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Marxism Today

JAMES KLUGMANN

THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNIST
PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

J. HENDY

INDUSTRIAL ARBITRATION—THE END OF
THE ROAD

R. BELLAMY

TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS AND PRICE
MOVEMENTS

M. R. KETTLE

A SOCIALIST OUTLOOK ON SOCIAL
SERVICES

DISCUSSION:

RUSCOE CLARKE

ON THE ARTIST AND POLITICS

T. D. SMITH

DAVID CRAIG

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Editorial correspondence

James Klugmann,
16 King Street, W.C.2.

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Margaret Williamson,
above address.

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The Foundation of the Communist Party of Great Britain

James Klugmann

The Background

IN 1914, on the eve of the First World War which was to sweep millions of British workers into the armed forces to kill or be killed by their fellow workers of other lands, there was a profound contradiction within the British Labour movement.

On the one hand there were great mass organisations—the trade unions and T.U.C., the Co-operative movement with all its manifold societies, the Labour Party and the Independent Labour Party, together embracing millions, but without a socialist outlook, led by men who preached and practised reformism and class conciliation—*mass organisations without socialism*. On the other, there were a number of socialist organisations, accepting scientific socialism, the ideas and approaches of Marxism, courageous but small, isolated, often sectarian—*socialism without the masses*.

With the war, all the oft-voted and oft-applauded resolutions against war of the Second International, Stuttgart, Basle, etc., were quickly forgotten. The official trade union movement, as the Webbs put it, became “part of the social machinery of state”. Trade union and Labour Party leaders recruited workers for the trenches to fight against workers recruited by German trade union and Social Democratic leaders who had also tried to transform their organisations into a “part of the social machinery of the state”.

There were of course very many workers in Britain who resisted participation in the war. Many (in the I.L.P. for instance) lacking revolutionary clarity, and finding no organisation or leadership to guide them in the struggle, expressed their opposition in *individual* resistance, pacifism, conscientious objection—courageous but ineffective. The British Socialist Party (B.S.P.) and Socialist Labour Party (S.L.P.) were both divided at the beginning of the war, and it was not until the 1916 Conference that the anti-war and internationalist section of the B.S.P. defeated the pro-war leadership. John Maclean on the Clyde-side gave a stirring example of how to lead masses of workers into political resistance against imperialist war. As the war con-

tinued, and with all the suffering that war entails, new organisations arose from the militant rank and file, mainly led by Marxists and revolutionaries, organisations in the factories, shipyards and pits, like the shop steward committees and, above all, the Clyde Workers' Committee, that fought, first against the effects of the war (dilution of labour, industrial conscription, rising prices and rents) and then, step by step, began to direct their fire against the war itself.

But with all these examples of individual and collective opposition and action, *something was lacking*. Lacking was a political party of the working class, a Marxist party, a new type of party, capable at one and the same time of explaining to the workers and the people the reactionary unjust nature of the imperialist war, and of leading them in the struggle against it in an organised, disciplined and effective way. As the war inexorably moved on, from month to month drawing its toll, many militant workers—in B.S.P., S.L.P., in shop stewards' and workers' committees, in I.L.P. or trade union branches—came, not yet clearly, often half unconsciously, to feel the urgent need for some new type of organisation, for some new type of party that would meet this crying need of the British working class.

In Tsarist Russia such a party existed, and that party, the party of the Bolsheviks that was to become the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had not only organised the mass political struggle against imperialist war but led the workers and their allies onwards to the triumph of the October Revolution. The October Revolution aroused in Britain not only a deep enthusiasm amongst the mass of the workers, reflected later in a widespread and effective fight against British intervention in Russia, but it led the more advanced socialist workers, especially in the B.S.P., S.L.P., in the Workers' Socialist Federation (W.S.F.), in the socialist societies in Wales, in the Shop Stewards' movement and in the left wing of the I.L.P., to pose the key question, what is it that with all the long British traditions of working class organisation, the long experience of struggle, with all the British Marxist groups and societies, what is

it that they in Russia had that we had not, and to reflect on the need in Britain for a new type of political Marxist revolutionary party capable of leading the working class to win political power.

The war ended. The brief post-war boom swiftly turned into the deep post-war depression. The promised land "fit for heroes to live in" became the land of dole and desolation. Unemployment figures topped first a million then the two million mark. Miners, engineers, railwaymen, cotton textile workers, moved into struggle; even the soldiers and the police force showed militant signs of rebellion against the old order. From all over Europe came reports of revolutionary struggle; in the whole colonial world great national liberation movements arose. Communist Parties began to be formed, and then in 1919, the Communist International. The struggles and opportunities of the stormy post-war years heavily underlined the need for a new revolutionary party.

It began to be clear that the old Marxist groups, though their role had been very courageous, very honourable, and at times of the highest importance, were no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the British working class. Something more was needed than loosely organised federations of socialist propaganda groups. A party was required that would at one and the same time fulfil three main tasks, that would:

1. Give the working class a scientific socialist theory, a socialist perspective, a socialist consciousness based on Marxism; help the working class and its allies to understand the capitalist system under which they lived, how to end it by winning political power and to replace it by a system of socialism.
2. Give leadership to the struggles of the working class and working people on all the issues which confronted them from day to day—wages, prices, social services, rents, issues of peace and democracy—that would lead, guide and co-ordinate such struggles from the most simple right up to the struggle for political power.
3. Provide the vanguard, the most conscious section of the British working class, with a new sort of organisation, a revolutionary organisation capable of leading the struggles of the working people.

It is true that this need was not yet seen with full clarity and there was much confusion and controversy amongst those militant revolutionary workers who strongly felt the need for the new party. But that a new party was needed was appreciated. The situation demanded it; experience had proved it, the struggles of the international working class movement, and particularly in the Soviet Union, confirmed it. History, as it were, was shouting aloud for the formation of a Communist Party.

Preparations and Negotiations

A new type of party was needed. History puts tasks before the working class, but the forces to fulfil these tasks come from living individuals and existing organisations with all their experiences and conceptions, with all their strength, and with all their weaknesses. What were the socialist and revolutionary organisations and groups in Britain from which the Communist Party emerged?

First the oldest, largest and most important was the *British Socialist Party* (B.S.P.), direct descendant of the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) founded in 1883. The B.S.P. had been a constituent member of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, had quickly (and incorrectly) quitted it, becoming re-affiliated to the Labour Party in 1916; a constituent member, too, of the Second International. Divided in its attitude at the beginning of the war, the internationalist anti-war section had defeated the old pro-war Executive, led by Hyndman, at the 1916 Conference, and henceforth, with its organ *The Call*, carried out a consistent and courageous struggle against the war and against the British intervention in Russia. For forty years (with its predecessor) it had educated and developed a succession of outstanding revolutionary leaders, keeping alive and spreading, though with some weaknesses, the understanding of Marxism. Organisationally it was weak, a loose federation of clubs and branches, mainly propagandist, and very isolated from the mass of the workers. Amongst its leaders in 1918-20 were Albert Inkpin (Secretary) and J. F. Hodgson, who together played a leading part in the negotiations to merge the Marxist groups and form a Communist Party; A. A. Watts (Treasurer) and F. Willis. John Maclean of the great Clyde battles had, by 1919, broken his associations with the B.S.P. William Gallacher was a member, but at this time was more involved in and identified with the Shop Stewards' movement on the Clyde. Harry Pollitt at this time was a young member gaining a growing reputation as a courageous fighter and militant speaker for socialism. Theodore Rothstein, who had spent years in Britain as a refugee from tsarism and an active theoretical leader in the S.D.F. and B.S.P., returned soon after the end of the war to his Soviet homeland.

It was the B.S.P. that was the principal initiator, most consistent negotiator for the formation of a Communist Party, and whose members formed the majority in the Communist Party once it was established.

The *Socialist Labour Party* (S.L.P.), which had begun as a Left split from the S.D.F. early in the century, and whose strength was overwhelmingly in Scotland, had a good record of militant struggle against the war and against the intervention in Russia. Its small membership, in the main in the

shipyards and machine shops around the Clyde, was deeply entrenched in the Shop Stewards' movement and provided many of the best leaders of the great shop steward struggles during and immediately following the war. Among its leaders were men of outstanding mass experience and also some of outstanding narrow dogmatism. The S.L.P., like the B.S.P., accepted Marxism. Though much of its Marxism was abstract, general, doctrinaire, it played an outstanding role in spreading socialist education amongst the Scottish workers, and its press and publications section had an influence completely out of proportion to its membership, bringing some of the classics of Marxism and some of the writings of Lenin to the British workers for the first time. Within the S.L.P. there was a strong sectarian trend; its constitution forbade its members to hold official positions in the trade union movement. Above all, in its hatred of the corruption of the right-wing Labour leaders, it drew the conclusion that it should stand against contact with and affiliation to the Labour Party.

The S.L.P. was, therefore, a combination of positive, militant and negative doctrinaire aspects. Its leadership ranged from experienced mass leaders like Arthur MacManus, Tom Bell and William Paul, to men of a narrow dogmatic outlook like Mitchell and Clunie. Along with the B.S.P., the S.L.P. played the main part in the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The *Workers' Socialist Federation* (W.S.F.) which participated throughout the negotiations for a Communist Party, was a very small group based almost exclusively in the East End of London. Led by Sylvia Pankhurst, an active and extremely personally courageous leader of the left wing of the pre-war women's suffrage movement, the W.S.F., with its paper *The Workers' Dreadnought*, opposed the war and was extremely active in making known and rallying support for the October Revolution and the young Soviet Republic. But the W.S.F., and above all Sylvia Pankhurst herself, brought to the movement an extremist "super revolutionary" sectarianism, almost contemptuous of the mass organisations of the working class. The W.S.F. preached anti-Parliamentarianism; it was categorically opposed to any form of contact with the Labour Party; it belittled immediate action on partial economic issues and participation in the struggles of the trade unions. It stood for "pure revolution", for a "straight", "undefiled", "uncompromising" revolutionary advance without stages, halts or alliances. It brought an atmosphere of intrigue and "personality" into the unity negotiations.

The *South Wales Socialist Society* (S.W.S.S.) was the fourth continuous participant in the main unity negotiations. The mining valleys of South Wales had long traditions of extremely militant struggle. The

South Wales Socialist Society was descended from the Miners' Reform movement, a militant opposition within the mining unions that had grown up before the war. Its trend was somewhat akin to syndicalism, mass revolutionary struggle through revolutionary trade unionism, suspicious of political parties and of the official trade union leaders. Organisationally the S.W.S.S. was extremely weak, in fact a loose federation of local socialist clubs, but behind it stood the deep revolutionary feelings of the Welsh miners, especially in the Rhondda. In fact it ceased to exist, as an organisation, before the negotiations were completed, and was replaced by the *South Wales Communist Council* (S.W.C.C.).

Shop Stewards

There were a number of other working class and socialist organisations directly or indirectly involved in the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain. *The National Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement* arose as a co-ordinating committee of the militant Shop Stewards' organisations that emerged in the First World War. Shop stewards had existed before, particularly in the engineering industry, as part of the normal trade union machinery. The great area of militant shop stewards' struggle was the Clydeside, but the movement spread to Northern England and to London. The Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committees began their struggles against the *economic* attacks of capitalism resulting from the war, but, inevitably, in the fight against direction of labour and conscription, they became more and more involved in *political* struggle against the war itself. The Clyde Workers' Committee, founded in 1915 under the leadership of William Gallacher, became later the Scottish Workers' Committee with its organ *The Worker*. In 1916 the N.S.S. and W.C.M. was founded. Opposing the war, the shop stewards' movement from the very outset hailed and supported the October Revolution, fought against intervention in Russia, voted their support, on its foundation, of the Communist International. The movement involved some of the most militant, class conscious workers from the factories, was strongly anti-reformist, but contained within itself a multitude of trends. In general the shop stewards' leaders were revolutionaries in outlook, were suspicious of parliamentary activity, and, hating the corruption of the right-wing leaders of the trade union movement and the Labour Party, became suspicious of "Labour politicians" as such. They tended not to see clearly the need for a political party though they wanted revolution, and often felt that it was the industrial movement itself that should carry through the political leadership of the struggle. Many of the leaders of the shop stewards' movement supported the formation of the Communist Party, including

W. Gallacher, J. R. Campbell, J. T. Murphy, Ted Lismer and David Ramsay. But the shop stewards' movement itself, a broad movement of shop stewards' committees involving workers of different political outlooks, was not as a whole, of course, directly concerned in the formation of the Party.

There were a number of smaller groups from whom militant workers came to work for the formation of the new united Party. Among these were some *Herald Leagues*, the *Guild Communists* (including R. Palme Dutt and R. Page Arnot), and the *Socialist Prohibition Fellowship*, led by Bob Stewart, who had spent a considerable part of the war in jail for his resistance activities.

Lastly, inside the I.L.P. there was a left-wing group drawn towards Marxism, inspired by the October Revolution, who came to understand the need to break with reformism, secede from the Second International, affiliate to the Communist International, and form in Britain along with the other revolutionary groupings a united Communist Party. In 1919-20 a number of such left-wing I.L.P.-ers organised themselves loosely into a "Left-Committee" which at the end of 1920 and early 1921 put out a paper—*The International*. Amongst these were Emile Burns, E. H. Brown, Shapurji Saklatvala, Helen Crawford, J. R. Wilson and J. Walton Newbold. They maintained personal relations with the Committee negotiating the organisation of the Communist Party, but for the moment confined their activities to an attempt to win the I.L.P. away from reformism and for a revolutionary policy.

Opportunism and Sectarianism

Such were the main groupings out of which the Communist Party was formed. Despite the militant revolutionary feelings in the working class movement in post-war Britain of the early 'twenties, reformism was still very strong and its influence very deep. Reformists sat in all the key positions of the mass Labour organisations. Even amongst many militant workers who fought capitalism *in fact* in their factory, pit or depot, who hated capitalism, who had a burning desire for a new socialist system, there was a deep belief that this socialism could be achieved by small continuous reforms within the framework of capitalism. In the centre of world imperialism it was inevitable that reformism should become entrenched. Opportunism, the sacrifice of the long-term interests of the working class to some immediate gain, the sacrifice of the interests of the class as a whole to the temporary interest of some part of it, was deeply based in the British Labour movement, not only in right-wing leaders but in the minds of very many of the workers themselves.

From this stemmed a second problem. Revolutionary British workers who had come by their

own experience to hate and reject the corruption, the opportunism, the policies of the reformist leaders, when they began to tear themselves away from this opportunism, could very easily, as it were, tear themselves out by the roots from the Labour movement itself and, in their sincere revolutionary disgust with right-wing betrayal, isolate themselves from the mass of workers still under opportunist influence. Sectarianism was the reverse side of opportunism, born of it and against it, but often aiding it unawares.

Sectarianism took many forms. Some militant workers, seeing the contemptible role of Labour M.P.s for whom they had sweated their guts out and collected their pennies, came to see all participation in parliamentary activity as a danger to the working class. Some, seeing the class conciliation of many official trade union leaders, began to turn away from the trade union movement. Some, seeing that there was no other path to socialism than the revolutionary path, the winning of political power by the working class and its allies, disgusted with the policy of petty reform under right-wing leaders only too content to find a niche in capitalism, belittled or denigrated the fight on immediate demands as "palliative measures" or "the patching up of capitalism". Many thought that militant workers should have no truck with or contact with the Labour Party.

Thus with many different approaches, different backgrounds in different sectors of the Labour movement, different loyalties to their own particular group, and inevitably a few whose revolutionary attitude was skin deep because at that time revolution was "in the air", and there were just a few who thought they could have all the glories of revolutionary success, without the patience and sacrifice, the setbacks and defeats, needed for socialist victory in what had been the centre of world imperialism—it was not surprising that the preparations and negotiations for the formation of the Communist Party were prolonged and complex.

The Negotiations for Unity

The actual negotiations fall into three main stages. In the first phase, from the end of the war to March 1919, there were a number of discussions between the B.S.P. and the I.L.P. and S.L.P. The Seventh Annual Conference of the B.S.P. (March 31st to April 1st, 1918), on a resolution from the Openshaw branch, called for "the co-operation of all active socialist forces with a view to formulating a common working basis". A number of meetings took place with the I.L.P., but it soon became clear that men like Philip Snowden and Ramsay MacDonald were not interested in a united socialist organisation, that they represented reformism, that they were utterly opposed to everything militant

or revolutionary. By March 1919 it had become clear that the socialist unity that was needed must be on the basis of Marxism, and though a number of the rank and file of the I.L.P. might be won towards a united Communist Party, continuation of official negotiations with the I.L.P. could bear no fruits.

The second and main phase of the unity negotiations took place from March 1919 to May 1920. There is not the space to deal with all the problems, controversies and setbacks in the succession of unity discussions that took place in the main between four organisations, the B.S.P., S.L.P., W.S.F. and S.W.S.S. The first unity meeting was held on May 13th, 1919, and already the main difficulties became clear. On the most fundamental issues there was virtually no disagreement. All accepted affiliation to the Communist International. All rejected class collaboration and reformism. All stood for revolutionary struggle, the overthrow of capitalism, the winning of political power by the working class, the establishment of the dictatorship of the working class to replace the present rule (dictatorship) of the capitalists. All supported the Soviets or Workers' Councils as the type of organisation that could both fight for and establish political power, and represent the democratic rule of the working class and its allies, the vast majority of the people.

The differences arose on two tactical questions. First, on what should be the attitude to parliamentary action? Should the new Party, once formed, work to get its representatives elected to Parliament? How should they work if elected? Secondly, what should be the attitude of the new party to the Labour Party? Should it or should it not apply for affiliation? The B.S.P. and S.L.P. stood for, and in practice carried out, parliamentary activity, and fought to send their representatives both to local councils and the House of Commons. The W.S.F. and S.W.S.S. strongly opposed parliamentary activity, considered it an impermissible compromise that would open them up inevitably to capitalist corruption.

The B.S.P., itself affiliated, strongly affirmed that the new party should apply for affiliation to the Labour Party. Against this, all the other three organisations opposed any relations whatsoever with the Labour Party, including affiliation.

For the next year (May 1919-May 1920) there followed a period of many discussions, polemics, debates both between and within the organisations concerned, the details of which cannot be given here. Only in May 1920 was the decision finally taken to call a Unity Convention, and to leave to the delegates assembled at that Convention the decision of the attitude of the new party to parliamentary activity and to affiliation to the Labour Party. On

this decision the B.S.P. was completely united, but the S.L.P. had split. The original members of the S.L.P. sent to the unity negotiations were Arthur MacManus, Tom Bell and W. Paul, some of the most experienced propagandists and organisers of the working class struggle who, whatever differences they might have with the B.S.P. on tactics, saw that the British working class needed a united Marxist party. But within the Executive of the S.L.P. was a hardened rump of deadened doctrinaires who were determined at all costs to make no concessions, and who at a certain stage disowned and expelled their own representatives on the unity negotiating committee. Under the leadership of MacManus and Bell an unofficial conference of members and branches of the S.L.P. was held at Nottingham in April 1920, which won the support of the big majority and all the best known figures. They, under the name of the *Communist Unity Group* (C.U.G.) continued the negotiations for a Communist Party when the S.L.P. had withdrawn into its own isolation.

The W.S.F. broke away from the negotiating committee in the early months of 1920 and began to work for an organisation of an anti-parliamentarian character.

The last stage of the negotiations began with June 1920. The Unity Convention had been agreed, and had been fixed to meet in London July 31st-August 1st, 1920. Now it was a question of preparatory organisational work. A joint provisional committee was set up to carry through the practical arrangements, with representatives from the B.S.P., C.U.G. and the South Wales Communist Council, which had now replaced the S.W.S.S. In July a public "Call for the Communist Party" was published. On July 29th the B.S.P. Journal *The Call* in its last issue issued its farewell notice: "With the holding of the Communist Unity Convention, the B.S.P. will cease its separate existence and its branches and members will be merged in the new Communist Party." The Unity Convention opened on Saturday, July 31st. The prolonged complex negotiations had ended in success.

Communist Unity Convention: July 31st-August 1st, 1920

The Unity Convention opened in London in the rather unusual atmosphere of the Cannon Street Hotel, more accustomed to City dignitaries; it adjourned at a later session, to the more familiar, but more crowded, International Socialist Club in the East Road, long a traditional meeting place of the socialist clubs.

Some 160 delegates attended with 211 mandates, of which 96 represented B.S.P. branches, 25 branches of the C.U.G. and 36 miscellaneous groups including I.L.P. branches, Shop Stewards' organisations, Guild Communists, Herald Leagues and local

socialist clubs and societies. A detailed report of the unity negotiations was accepted. Fraternal messages were read from different parties and individuals, including from the veteran Socialist Clara Zetkin, from Tom Mann, from the left-wing group of the I.L.P. But the greatest enthusiasm of the delegates was for the personal message from Lenin, in which he stated that he was in complete sympathy with the plans for the immediate organisation of a Communist Party in Britain, that he considered the W.S.F. and Sylvia Pankhurst wrong not to participate, that he, personally, was in favour of participation in Parliament and of "adhesion to the Labour Party on condition of free and independent Communist activity".

The convention passed to the discussion of fundamental strategy, on which there was no disagreement and which, therefore, was unanimously accepted. It then turned to the controversial debates which all the delegates were expectantly awaiting—first on parliamentary activity, and then on affiliation to the Labour Party.

The resolution on parliamentary action was moved by Tom Bell. It repudiated the reformist conception that socialism can be achieved by purely parliamentary activity and successions of parliamentary elections, but proclaimed that electoral and parliamentary activity provided a valuable means of propaganda and agitation for socialism. The new Communist Party, it stated, must carry out electoral activity both in the local councils and the House of Commons, and its representatives, when elected, must fight for the policy decided by the Party.

The discussion took the form of a direct debate—speakers taking sides and arguing for or against. Six speakers opposed the resolution and thirteen supported it. What was the essence of the polemic?

The main case of those who opposed parliamentary and electoral activity was that—and they spoke from long and bitter experience—Parliament corrupts and that no matter what measures were taken elected M.P.s could not, under capitalism, be controlled or recalled. How many of those sent by the efforts of militant workers to council or Parliament, full of fight and promise, forgot their past struggles and promises, and deserted the cause of socialism!

Some argued that in any case it was through *industrial action* and not through Parliament that socialism could be achieved. It was a waste of time and money, said some.

Those supporting the motion endeavoured to make it clear that in defending parliamentary action they did *not* mean, in any sense, that socialism would be brought about by electoral activity *alone*. But Parliament was an important tribune of public opinion and it was necessary to use it as one means amongst others to influence the mass of the people. It was not true, they argued, that you could defeat

capitalism by economic activity and industrial action alone. Political *and* economic struggle were necessary. To those who assumed that socialist members of Parliament were doomed to inevitable corruption the supporters of the resolution replied that Communist M.P.s must be subject to the Executive Committee of the Party, and carry out Party policy. They quoted Karl Liebknecht and Clara Zetkin in the Reichstag as examples of socialists who had not been corrupted by Parliament, but on the contrary had fought in Parliament to support the struggle of the people. They cited too the successful experiences of the Russian Revolution.

When, finally, after heated debate, the motion was put to the vote by cards, the result showed 186 cards, representing 4,650 votes, for the motion and nineteen cards, representing 475 votes, against.

The Debate on Affiliation

The results of the debate on parliamentary action had been more or less a foregone conclusion. The controversy on which the result was by no means certain was on affiliation to the Labour Party. Once again the discussion took the form of a direct debate. Two opposing motions were put forward. One, moved by J. F. Hodgson of the B.S.P., a calm, reasoned speaker, that the Communist Party should be affiliated to the Labour Party, and the other, moved by William Paul of the S.L.P., practised propagandist and lecturer, that it should not be affiliated. Twenty-three speakers spoke in the discussion, nine for and fourteen against affiliation. What was the essence of the debate?

Those opposing maintained that the Labour Party was through and through opportunist. There was no hope for it. From their own experience, said some, they had seen its role of class conciliation. A constantly recurring argument was that the new Party must be kept untarnished, free from corruption. Relations with the Labour Party, they argued, would be bound to discredit it in the eyes of the most militant sections of the workers. As for Lenin's advice, some said, he was a great revolutionary, for whom they had great respect, but he was not infallible. Above all it was the argument of "purity" of doctrine and conduct that was repeated again and again.

Those supporting the case for affiliation, ably led by Hodgson of the B.S.P., argued that support for affiliation did not mean in any sense support for the right-wing policy of men like MacDonald, Snowden and J. H. Thomas. But the Labour Party had been founded as an organisation bringing together all forces and trends in the Labour movement, Left, Right and Centre. Such it should remain, and, within it, the Left, militant and revolutionary section should put forward their

views just as was done by the I.L.P., or by the right-wing Fabians. Indeed, said some, the extreme Right in the Labour Party were anxious to change its traditional character, to exclude those with militant and revolutionary conceptions just so that the most right-wing reformism should be free to dominate the mass of Labour Party members.

In any case, it was argued, it was quite incorrect to identify the great mass of Labour Party members with the right-wing leaders of the MacDonald type. Strong arguments were put by the supporters of affiliation against the "purism", the "dogmatism", of those who wanted to "march straight ahead" to the revolution without swerving, halting, making compromises.

When the final vote was taken, and it was clear from the debate that it would be a near thing, it showed a small majority of 100 to 85 for affiliation to the Labour Party.

The Convention, before concluding, had a tentative discussion on organisational questions, and adopted a document "Tentative Proposals providing for Transformation into the Communist Party", mainly concerned with measures of a purely organisational character. There was not as yet any real discussion of how far a *new type* of revolutionary party needed a *new type* of organisation. The new Party was founded, but it still had the old type of organisation of the earlier socialist groups. It was agreed that as from the Convention a weekly organ of the Party should be published, *The Communist*. A provisional Executive Committee was established by adding to the existing joint provisional committee six delegates elected by the Convention. Amongst miscellaneous discussions a resolution moved by the delegate of the Socialist Prohibition Fellowship, calling on the Communist Party to throw its weight in favour of complete suppression of manufacture of alcoholic liquors for beverage purposes, was referred to the Executive for decision, where it remains to this day.

On the day the Convention opened, the *Daily Herald*, still in those days a militant paper, admirably summed up in these words the foundation of the Communist Party:

"The founding of such a Party we can count emphatically a gain to the movement in this country. It is not a new split. It is indeed a fusion. But it is more than that. It is the creation of an organisation for the expression in action of a definite and existent body of revolutionary thought. . . . They are preparing to face the problem which too many of us are inclined temperamentally to evade—the problem of the 'how' and the 'now' of the British revolution. In so far as their basis is already decided, they seem to have avoided very well the twin trap of a too rigid orthodoxy and a too vague latitudinarianism. They stand rigidly for revolution and against all compromise with capitalism. . . .

" . . . in any revolutionary movement the alternative is not between dictatorship and no dictatorship. It is between the dictatorship of the workers and the dictatorship of the capitalists—or of their generals.

"To accept that is really to accept facts. And to refuse it seems to us to ignore facts which happen to be unpalatable. The strong point of the Communist Party is its steady realism."

The first step had been taken.

Lenin and the Communist International

While the delegates to the Unity Convention were fighting out the tactical line of the new Party, a similar debate on a larger, international, scale was taking place at the sessions of the Second Congress of the Third (Communist) International. Similar differences of approach and tactics existed in varying degrees throughout the world revolutionary movement.

Ten British delegates attended, officially and/or unofficially, some or all of the Congress sessions between July 19th to August 7th, 1920. Six were officially registered as delegates to the Congress—Tom Quelch and William McLaine of the B.S.P., David Ramsay, Jack Tanner and J. T. Murphy from the Shop Stewards, and Dick Beech from the International Workers of the World. William Gallacher attended as a leader of the Scottish Shop Stewards; Sylvia Pankhurst arrived late and attended the later sessions.

Here again the great debate was repeated on parliamentary activity and relations with the Labour Party. Participation in parliamentary activity was strongly opposed by William Gallacher, by most of the other Shop Stewards' representatives and by Sylvia Pankhurst. On the issue of the Labour Party the B.S.P. delegates, of course, argued the case for affiliation, though often glossing over the problems and belittling the reactionary character of the existing Labour leadership. The other British delegates opposed. Lenin participated himself, with all his eloquence and understanding, in the discussions. His book on "*Left Wing*" *Communism: an Infantile Disorder* had just been published, and he took to the floor of the Congress and its Commissions his fight not only against reformism and opportunism but, at the same time, against sectarianism. He had written to Sylvia Pankhurst, already in August 1919, on the need for participation by revolutionaries in parliamentary activity, declaring that:

"If the workers' party is really *revolutionary*, if it is really a *workers'* party (that is, connected with the masses, with the majority of the working people, with the *rank and file* of the proletariat and not merely with its upper stratum), if it is really a *party*, i.e. a firmly, effectively knit *organisation of the revolutionary vanguard*, which knows how to carry on revolutionary work among the masses by

all possible means, then such a party will surely be able to keep *its own* parliamentarians in hand to make of them real revolutionary propagandists, such as Karl Liebknecht was, and not opportunists, not corrupters of the proletariat with bourgeois methods, bourgeois customs, bourgeois ideas, bourgeois poverty of ideas."

In *Left Wing Communism* (April-May 1920) Lenin came out for the support of a Labour government in Britain by British revolutionaries, but he did not as yet touch on the question of affiliation to the Labour Party. He came out for affiliation in his *Draft Theses on the Main Tasks of the Second Congress of the Second International* (July 4th, 1920) and in his Message (dated July 8th, 1920) to the London Unity Convention, and, above all, in his speeches at the Second Congress itself (July-August 1920).

In all Lenin's writings and speeches on Britain in this period he laid great emphasis on the need for and the role of a Communist Party. The formation of the Party, he stressed, in his *Letter to Sylvia Pankhurst* of August 1919, is urgent. He was in favour of its formation without delay, even if the disagreement on tactical questions meant that, at first, two parties would be formed working side by side. At the Second Congress of the Communist International he repeatedly addressed himself to the Shop Stewards' delegates, who tended to be suspicious of all political parties and to see the Shop Stewards' or workers' committees in general as sufficient for the leadership of the militant and revolutionary working class movement. He explained that what was wanted was a new type of revolutionary political party that would, on the one hand, give theoretical leadership, political understanding, training in the art and science of politics, the leading section of the working class; while, on the other, closely linked to the general Labour movement, it would help to lead in struggle the mass of the working class. Particularly he emphasised the need for the Communist Party to be intimately linked with the mass of the workers.

Further Negotiations

The Commission of the Second Congress of the Communist International that was devoted to consideration of the Labour Party and similar problems, ended, after Lenin had spoken, with a vote of 58 to 24 in favour of affiliation. The Congress discussion, and above all the patient and persuasive argumentation of Lenin, exercised a considerable influence on the British delegation, especially on William Gallacher.

In his *Revolt on the Clyde* Gallacher describes the effects of his discussions with Lenin:

"Gradually, as the discussion went on, I began to see the weakness of my position. . . .

"The more I talked with Lenin and the other

comrades, the more I came to see what the Party of the workers meant in the revolutionary struggle. It was on this, the conception of the Party, that the genius of Lenin had expressed itself. A Party of revolutionary workers, with its roots in the factories and in the streets, winning the Trade Unions and the Co-operatives with the correctness of its working class policy, a Party with no other interests but the interests of the working class and peasant and petty bourgeois allies of the working class, such a Party, using every avenue of expression, could make an exceptionally valuable parliamentary platform for arousing the great masses of workers to energetic struggle against the capitalist enemy."

Immediately following the Second Congress of the Communist International, a new attempt was made in Britain to bring together into the Communist Party those Marxist groups that still remained outside. Between August 1920 and January 1921 a series of meetings and discussions took place which culminated in the Leeds Unity Convention at the end of January (which became known as the Second Congress of the C.P.G.B.).

Two factors contributed to the success of these negotiations. In the first place, the London Unity Convention had already united into a single organisation, the C.P.G.B., all the most important revolutionary groups outside Scotland. The new organisation had already gone into action, and exercised a strong attraction on those revolutionary workers and intellectuals that still remained outside. Secondly, the Communist International made a strong plea for the final merger of all Marxist forces in Britain into a single Communist Party.

Discussions took place, first, *within* the groups that had remained outside the C.P.G.B. William Gallacher, returning to Britain, made a strong appeal, for the merging of all Communist forces, to the Second Conference of the *Communist Labour Party* (C.L.P.) meeting at the beginning of October, and representing a number of the militant and revolutionary forces in the Scottish Shop Stewards' movement. Finally, it was agreed that the C.L.P. should participate in unity discussions.

The W.S.F., which by this time had given itself the high-sounding title of *Communist Party (British Section of the Third International)* C.P. (B.S.T.I.) met in mid September 1920 and, after the report from Sylvia Pankhurst, finally decided to join the unity discussions. A further conference of the C.P. (B.S.T.I.) held at Cardiff on December 4th-5th, 1920, elected its delegates for the unity negotiations. In fact, while formally supporting the conception of a united Communist Party, a number of leading figures within the C.P. (B.S.T.I.) were working to organise what they called a "Left bloc" within the new Party, which would carry on with its old leftist and anti-parliamentarian policies and maintain an organisation *within* the new organisation.

The official S.L.P., despite continuous approaches from the C.P.G.B. and Unity Committee, remained strictly opposed to every form of unity negotiation and its organ, *The Socialist*, continued to fulminate against the merger.

In October-November, 1920, the C.P.G.B. made contact with the other organisations concerned, and a Unity Committee was set up to complete the unification of the Communist and revolutionary groups, which included representatives from the C.P.G.B., C.L.P., C.P. (B.S.T.I.) and maintained contact with the National Shop Stewards' and Workers' Committee Movement and with the left-wing group of the I.L.P. Agreement was reached that on January 29th-30th, 1921, a Unity Convention should be held at Leeds to bring about the merger of all the revolutionary groups with the C.P.G.B., and that it would establish a united Communist Party. Voting was to be on the basis of one vote for every twenty-five represented. The new provisional Executive Committee was to be formed on the basis of three from the C.P.G.B., two each from C.L.P. and C.P. (B.S.T.I.), and ten elected by the convention on a geographical basis.

Compared with the London Unity Convention of six months previous, the Leeds meeting was relatively calm and unpolemical. The main political issues—strategical and tactical, long-term and short-term—had already been agreed in the process of the preliminary unity discussions.

The Convention was attended by 170 delegates representing branches of the C.P.G.B., C.L.P., C.P. (B.S.T.I.), and of various independent groups. The Report of the Unity Committee was put and unanimously accepted. The representative of the left-wing group of the I.L.P. greeted the Congress, but explained that he and his colleagues would remain within the I.L.P. until, at its forthcoming Easter conference, its attitude to Communist policy and the Communist International was defined. (In fact, after the Easter conference several hundred members of the left-wing Committee came over and joined the Communist Party).

W. Gallacher moved the formal motion for the merger. "In the past", he said, "each section had seemed more anxious to impress . . . with its own revolutionary fervour than to get together with other sections . . . we had failed in the past because too many of us had been concerned with personalities rather than with principles". The Resolution which he moved, establishing a single united Communist Party of Great Britain, was unanimously adopted. A preliminary discussion took place on future work and organisation, and it was agreed that, following the Convention, Divisional (area) aggregate meetings should be held in different parts of the country to set up Divisional (area) Councils linked with the Executive Committee, which would co-ordinate

activity throughout the country. *The Communist* was ratified as the official organ of the Party, which kept the name of Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.). Provisional Rules and Constitution were adopted. The provisional Executive Committee was established as agreed, with representatives from the C.P.G.B., C.L.P., C.P. (B.S.T.I.), and ten comrades elected on a geographical basis—a total of twenty members with Arthur MacManus as Chairman, and Albert Inkpin, later, appointed Secretary.

The First Balance Sheet

The first step had been taken. From the different revolutionary groups, societies and trends a single Communist Party had been formed, a Marxist revolutionary Party with an agreed general approach and accepted tactics. Preparations had been long, complex, and, at times, extremely difficult. The working class owes very much to those comrades like J. F. Hodgson, Albert Inkpin, Arthur MacManus and Tom Bell who kept the negotiations from breaking down, and saw the need to subordinate their own personal associations and loyalties to the prime need of a united party.

How can we summarise the stage reached, the balance of achievement and weakness reached by the time of the conclusion of the Leeds Convention?

The new Party still had many and very deep weaknesses:

(a) Unity had been achieved, but this did not, by any means, signify that unity of outlook was as yet solidly established. Majority decisions had been taken, but conviction was not yet reached. Within the single Party, to an extent, different trends and approaches continued to exist and to conflict with one another.

(b) The C.P.G.B. accepted Marxism. It stood for a revolutionary path to socialism. It saw that in order successfully to achieve socialism the working class and its allies would have to win political power and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the Party was still, in many ways, only on the surface of the understanding of Marxism-Leninism. It had inherited much that was dogmatic, abstract, and not in reality Marxist in its theoretical approach. There was not yet a deep understanding of the relation of the mass struggles on immediate issues to the revolutionary struggle for political power; there was little understanding as yet of the nature of imperialism and its effect on the British Labour movement; there was little attempt, as yet, to apply the general approach of Marxism to the particular conditions of Britain.

(c) Although the new Party had accepted the line of mass activity, parliamentary activity, application for affiliation to the Labour Party, it was still very isolated from the mass of the workers, its

influence confined to a few main industrial areas like London, South Wales, Lancashire and Scotland; and it still had few roots in industry and the factories.

(d) The new Party had inherited its organisational form from the earlier socialist groups. Its branches were still the old type of propagandist groups, loosely linked by a co-ordinating centre, itself based on representatives of different trends and different geographical areas. It was a Party of a new type with a new role and, as yet, an old type of organisation.

Positive Achievement

Against this the positive achievement and the gain to the British working class movement was immensely positive. The formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain represented an historical step of the greatest importance:

(a) The Marxist groups—for nearly seventy years divided, turned in on each other, each with its own personal and group loyalties—were now united into a single Party with a common approach and common tactics.

(b) This Party put before the British working class an alternative to the opportunism and reformism that had doomed them again and again to defeat, retreat and demoralisation. It put before them a scientific understanding of the struggle for socialism, Marxism-Leninism. Against the acceptance of a capitalist state as something neutral and above classes, it showed the need of the struggle of the working class for political power. Against the reformist doctrine of class collaboration it clearly put the need for class struggle. It made no promises of easy victory, but showed that the only road to the successful achievement of Socialism was the revolutionary road through the struggle of the working people, led by the working class, and

in their turn led by a revolutionary Communist Party.

(c) The Party had begun, though *only* begun, to recognise the dangers of dogmatism and dead doctrinaire socialism, and to see the need for the revolutionary vanguard of the workers to emerge from sectarian isolation from the majority of the working class and their mass organisations. It had accepted tactics of parliamentary activity and links with the Labour Party, breaking with the worst sectarian traditions of the earlier socialist groups.

(d) The new Party was part of the Communist International, led by Lenin; it saw the need for international working class solidarity. Within this framework, it could both begin to make its own contribution more effectively to the international movement and benefit from the experience of the working class movement throughout the world.

Lenin had always understood and explained the peculiar difficulty of building a revolutionary party in a country that had for so long been the centre of world imperialism, and where, as a result, reformism and opportunism had penetrated so deeply as an influence in the working class movement. The British bourgeoisie was one of great experience and surpassing cunning, capable of wielding the bludgeon of brutality and, at the same time, flattery and cajolery to corrupt working class leaders.

The formation of the Communist Party meant raising the revolutionary banner in a country where reformism had deeply penetrated the working class movement, and where all the key positions of the Labour movement were in reformist hands.

Now for the first time a new type of Party existed that could show the way forward for the British working class. It is true that it was as yet very small, had many weaknesses, that a long and difficult journey lay ahead of it, but the first necessary and historically important step had now been taken.

Industrial Arbitration—the End of the Road

J. Hendy

IN October 1954 I contributed to *Marxist Quarterly* an article in which I tried to analyse the functions of the British system of industrial arbitration during a period of so-called full employment. I drew attention to the fact that, during the past sixty years, proposals for the avoidance of disputes, for the strengthening of negotiating machinery, and for recourse to arbitration, have been urged upon the trade union movement precisely at those moments when there is a rising spirit of militancy among the workers, or when the employers are about to launch an attack upon the workers' living standards.

The conclusion clearly to be drawn, as I saw it at the time, was that arbitration was merely a "defence in depth" for the employers, and that the current propaganda in favour of arbitration was an attempt to deceive the workers and to defraud them.

With the passing of five years since that opinion was expressed, the time may well have come when the conclusions then arrived at might usefully be re-examined in order to determine whether new circumstances challenge their general validity. This re-examination may be all the more relevant since certain of the smaller trade unions, at the 1959 Trades Union Congress, made a strong plea for the retention of the right of access to some form of arbitration, and this plea received sympathy and encouragement from the General Council of the T.U.C.

Perhaps the best way of looking at the whole matter is to see it in perspective, against the background of events. We can most readily do this by contrasting the attitude adopted towards arbitration by the Government and employers during the period up to 1954, with the attitude they have taken up since 1957.

During the earlier of these two periods, the attitude of the employers and of the Government was made quite explicit by the Minister of Labour, Sir Walter Monckton, who on March 3rd, 1954, declared: "We want to see wherever possible introduced into the machinery (of negotiation) provision voluntarily agreed upon for voluntary arbitration."

The Industrial Disputes Tribunal

Seven months previously, on August 1st, 1953, the Government had introduced the Industrial Disputes Order (S.I. 1376) providing for the setting up of an Industrial Disputes Tribunal to which recourse might be had by either side of industry, and which had the power to give a binding award. It was in this context that a tremendous propaganda drive had taken place for the purpose of creating a climate of opinion which would regard strikes as both unjustifiable in the light of "Britain's precarious economic position", and as unnecessary in view of the "excellent" provisions existing for the settlement of disputes.

The manner in which the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the spokesmen of the banks and of the T.U.C. all joined in the attempt to enlarge and develop this climate of opinion, is a matter on which I dwelt at length in the article to which reference has already been made, and there is little need to elaborate the details of that co-operative effort to provide first-aid for the ailing Establishment.

The question of how sick the devil really was, is a matter of opinion. The fact is that he later seemed to feel stronger, to get back on his feet, and to thus give the neighbourhood at large the opportunity of making a better assessment as to his normal behaviour.

By 1957, for a variety of reasons which we need not now go into, the era of full employment was apparently coming to an end. At the beginning of the year, an article in the *Financial Times* declared: "If the 3 per cent pattern does become effective throughout industry, it will represent a major success for Government policy." What the Government policy was needs no elaboration. It was, and is, a policy of wage restraint. The 3 per cent referred to by the *Financial Times* was the offer expected in a number of industries, and specifically awarded in a 5s. per week increase granted by the Industrial Disputes Tribunal in respect of Municipal busmen.

However, the most powerful group of private employers in Britain, the Federations of Engineering and Shipbuilding employers, had already made

up their minds that 3 per cent was too much. On May 31st, 1956, long before any pay claim had been formulated, they announced in advance that any claim made would be rejected. After a claim was presented, in October, the employers spent a further five months in justifying the conclusions they had arrived at before the argument had started.

On March 11th, 1957, Sir William Grant, the chairman of the West of England Engineering Employers Federation, fired the opening shot of what he seemed to believe was a new War of Independence, to be fought by a latter-day George Washington. He declared:

"This time we do not want Government interference. That is quite positive. We want to fight it out by ourselves. The Government would do a great injustice to industry as a whole if they attempted to interfere this time. We have got to stand firm and prove to these fellows that things are not done so easily."

Less flamboyantly, but equally to the point, a special correspondent in the *Times Review of Industry* for March 1957 wrote:

"With unemployment well above the average for the time of the year, and fears that the Government's policy will cause further increases, many unions have decided that their members are in no mood to fight for money. The figures which will govern union policy in 1957 will be found not so much in the Price, Wages, and Production Indices, or in statistics of earnings and profits, as in the ratio of short time to overtime, and of notified vacancies to registered unemployed."

As is well known, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions determined to take strike action, undeterred by these threats. The shipbuilding strike began on March 16th, and the engineering strike on the 20th. It was not long before a million and a half workers were engaged in this strike. Faced with direct action, on a scale and with an enthusiasm unparalleled since the General Strike of 1926, the Government announced that it had decided to set up Courts of Inquiry into both disputes.

As is equally well known, the president of the A.E.U., Mr. William Carron, used his casting vote on the A.E.U. Executive Committee to decide against further continuance of the stoppage, so that the Confederation—overborne by the massive block vote cast by the A.E.U.—resolved by majority to recommend a resumption of work on April 4th, the day on which the shipbuilding court commenced its sittings.

Subsequently, the courts made an award of either 8s. 6d. per week increase without condi-

tions, or 11s. per week with conditions. (The amounts relate to skilled workers—other grades received less.) These conditions—the so-called "strings"—were the elimination of restrictive practices, and the freezing of all further applications for wage adjustments for a period of one year. In the end, the "strings" were accepted and embodied into what was called an "annexe" to the agreement; Mr. W. Carron remarking that the "breathing space" created by the period of wage freeze would afford an opportunity of pressing on with claims for a shortening of working hours. Having made his announcement, Mr. Carron imitated papal tradition, and kept his dispositions *in petto*. In the event, no pressing on took place, and the bastions of the employers remained unshaken, for by the autumn they were strong enough to dismiss with contempt a claim for shorter hours.

The Employers' Attitude

The point that matters for us in this context is not that the decisions of the courts aroused great discontent among trade unionists. The important feature is the fact that the awards aroused the fury of the employers. It is now quite clear that they had determined that the time had come to put an end to the whole idea that industrial disputes should be resolved by recourse to arbitration.

It was, from their point of view, most unfortunate that the Government (that "Executive Committee of the Bourgeoisie as a whole," as Engels used to call it) had felt impelled, through considerations of electoral prospects and other pressures, to intervene and to prevent the engineering employers from indulging in the free-for-all for which they had been in training for so long. The real opinions of the engineering employers have since been made quite clear in a little booklet which they issued in 1959, entitled: *Looking at Industrial Relations*. In this, they declare that had it not been for what they call "Government interference", they would have given the unions a good beating. In fact, they declare:

"Twice in four years the Federation have been prepared to fight it out with the unions. Clearly the unions' capacity to pay strike benefit was limited. Such a course, involving as it would have done the virtual closing down of the industry, might have been a worthwhile calculated risk."

The employers also went on to describe the wage negotiations in the engineering industry as "an annual extortion of danegeld", and they referred with contempt to the continuous efforts

of the unions to claim a share of increased productivity and to secure higher living standards for their members. Never more clearly, perhaps, was the true attitude of employers to unions revealed—the desire not merely to defeat but to destroy.

Needless to say, the views of this powerful section of the employing class were urged upon their friends and colleagues in the Government, and though the Government has no convenient “York Memorandum” to afford it the managerial rights over the nation that its engineering colleagues have over their industrial establishments, it did what it thought it decently could, as soon as it felt that the coast was clear.

It was, therefore, no surprise to informed opinion, when, on October 22nd, 1958, the Government announced that it was putting an end to the Industrial Disputes Tribunal. Now, it is important to remember that the I.D.T. was endowed with the power, not merely to determine “issues”, e.g. whether or not a given employer was observing the terms of an Industrial Agreement applicable to any particular trade; it also had the more important power of making an award on matters which arise *de novo*, i.e. where unions make application for new terms of agreement, such as increases in wages, or improvements in working conditions.

As soon as, therefore, the official announcement was made that the Tribunal would terminate its function as and from March 1st, 1959, many unions at once made up their minds to submit claims to the Tribunal before its sittings came to an end. The Confederation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Unions, by a majority vote, determined that the claim for a 40-hour week, which had been contemptuously rejected on November 21st, 1957, and again on August 27th 1958, by the engineering employers, should be brought before the Tribunal. This case concerning the 40-hour week was one of the last major references which came to the Tribunal’s attention, and upon its outcome rested all the faith of those reformists who believed with Sir William Beveridge (*Full Employment in a Free Society*) that such matters ought to be determined “with some regard to general equities and not simply by the bargaining power of particular groups of men”.

It was, therefore, with a mixture of rage, astonishment, and despair, that the apostles of the new order, who had thought the most important lever in the trade union machine was the brake, learned of the Tribunal’s findings, given on February 18th, 1959. In its wisdom, and after long consideration of the generality of all the equities, the I.D.T. had come to the conclu-

sion that “the Tribunal do not think it would be appropriate for them to make an award on this claim, as any such award would have far-reaching consequences”. Like Pontius Pilate, the Tribunal had washed its hands of the whole matter and referred it back to the contending parties. Thus ended—or shall we say, ought to have ended—all those cosy superstitions so widely held in the higher echelons of the trade union movement, that arbitration was a convenient means of breaking new ground, of bringing about new advances in wages standards, or in conditions and terms of employment. Superstition, however, dies hard. As we shall see, those who thought that faith could still move mountains continued to elaborate their blue-prints for the construction of further castles in the air.

“Tripartite Responsibility”

The minds of the dominant group on the General Council of the T.U.C. were still impregnated with the time-honoured Mondist concept of tripartite responsibility, wherein the trade union movement had all the rights and duties of partnership with the employers and with the Government. It seemed quite unfair that the junior partner should be treated as a mere employee, after devoting the best years of his life to the well-being of the old firm of John Bull Ltd.

Some minds went back to the day when *The Times* (6.3.54) had been able to report with favour the declaration of the late Mr. Arthur Deakin on behalf of his 1,300,000 members (without consulting them) that “arbitration obviates the necessity of stoppages which interfere with the economic prospects of the country”. It had been in continuance of this spirit that at the 1958 T.U.C. the General Council had accepted a motion calling for the retention of the Industrial Disputes Order, the mover of which—Mr. Prestwich—made it clear that in his opinion, “Collective bargaining cannot function satisfactorily unless there is acceptance of the fact that both sides have a case”. It was in this spirit that the General Council reported that it had met representatives of the Government and of the British Employers Confederation, and that it regretted that the employers were now of the opinion that arbitration should be available only where both sides agreed in advance to contract-in for such provision.

The second of these abortive meetings had taken place in January 1958, and as the General Council reported to the 1959 Congress: “No suggestion was received for further talks and it was therefore a great surprise to be informed in September (1958) of the Minister’s decision to let the Order (1376) lapse.”

Had the T.U.C. been wide awake, it might have noticed that the economic and political situation in Britain had undergone a significant change—a change which was reflected in the attitudes of the Government and of the employers. “Defence in depth” was no longer required. The time had come to move to the offensive, and preparations had been under way for some time already.

Award Turned Down

The General Council might have grasped the significance of the new trend had it noted the events of the autumn of 1957, when, on November 1st, the Government vetoed the award of a Civil Service arbitration tribunal which proposed to give a 3 per cent increase to Health Service workers. On October 29th, Mr. D. Walker Smith, Minister of Health stated: “If wage increases on the scale which they have been given in the past, and are still being today demanded, were, in fact granted, I have no doubt as to the result. It would be a disaster to this country.” Next day, Mr. Macleod, Minister of Labour, declared flatly: “We will not finance inflationary awards however these awards are secured, whether through negotiation or through arbitration.”

When, therefore, a few days later, another Civil Service award of an increase in salary was issued on behalf of a small group of draughtsmen employed in the Ordnance Survey, the Department concerned immediately reduced its pay-roll by dismissing 100 of its 116 unestablished staff.

If this was what was happening in the green wood of Whitleyism, it can well be imagined what was going on in the dry. On March 26th, 1958 the Minister of Labour flatly refused to set up a Committee of Inquiry into the London busmen's claim. On April 10th, the Railway Staff National Tribunal rejected the railwaymen's claim for increased pay, the attitude of the employers' side having been well expressed by Mr. Valentine, spokesman for the British Transport Commission, in the following words: “The Commission have never accepted that as a principle, salaries and wages either can or should be increased at any time to keep pace with increases in the cost of living.”

Everyone knows the story of the strike of London busmen in the spring of 1958 and there is no need to enlarge upon it. Everyone knows why they found it necessary to fight. The scene had been laid the previous autumn, when on September 19th the Government had raised the bank rate to 7 per cent. The Prime Minister was determined to re-establish the ascendancy of the City, from which, he said: “We gain great advantage.” A writer in the *Financial Times*, comment-

ing upon the policy adopted by Mr. Thorneycroft, Chancellor of the Exchequer, wrote: “The critical level of unemployment” needed to force this policy through is “a little under 5 per cent”. More to the point were the remarks of Mr. Davenport in the *Spectator* of October 4th, 1957:

“The conclusion I reach, after a careful study of Mr. Thorneycroft's statement, is that its economics are unsound and are, in fact, designed to cloak a political purpose which is to make unemployment so bad that Mr. Cousins and other trade union leaders will be forced to drop this militancy.”

In the light of all these events, the suggestion of the T.U.C. General Council that they learned with “great surprise” of the Ministers' intention to revoke the Industrial Disputes Order must rank as the most fatuous statement of the year. At its meeting in September, 1958, the General Council had gone on record in favour of the Order's principles being maintained. They said the Order provided three valuable facilities: (a) an opportunity to unions to seek some redress in sections of employment where they are sometimes not recognised and where the strike weapon is not used; (b) a means of obtaining a decision without a jointly agreed reference where negotiation has failed, and, (c) a very suitable way (through the “issues” procedure) of preventing unfair competition by enforcing widely agreed conditions of work upon non-federated or minority employers.

It may be remarked, in passing, that the assertions made in section (a) of this declaration appear to have but slight foundation in fact. As the debate at the 1959 Congress showed, unrecognised unions, and unions “where the strike weapon is not used”, do not appear to have been able to improve their situation very much, whether statutory provision for arbitration is available or not. A letter which appeared in *The Times* in November, 1959, over the signature of Mr. H. Levitt, Secretary of the Guild of Insurance Officials, seems to confirm this point, at least so far as unrecognised unions are concerned. Other unions resorting to arbitration receive at most something of the “consequential adjustments” arising from the more direct gains of those unions which do, from time to time, resort to the strike weapon.

However, the General Council asked the Minister to reconsider his decision to revoke the Order. He refused. He was then asked to amend his decision, and to allow the Tribunal to deal with the “issues”. The Minister refused again.

At this point the third leg of the tripartite stool seemed to be in danger of being chopped up for firewood. In desperation the T.U.C. appointed a sub-committee of its leading members to examine all legislation concerning industrial matters

"with a view to recommending changes, even though these changes might have to await another government". With the possibility of a General Election in the offing, the Government took the hint. Discussions took place in December, 1958, and in March, 1959, the Government introduced into its Wages Councils Amendment Bill a new clause (Clause 8) which gave to the Industrial Court the power to deal with "issues" which had resided in the now defunct Industrial Disputes Tribunal. The Bill passed into Law on May 30th, 1959, and re-established the right of unions to take up "issues", namely those issues which arise out of the failure of any particular employer to observe conditions of employment which have been established generally by agreement in any given industry or occupation.

In other words the union can enforce an agreement, but only if such an agreement is already in being. Except in industries already covered by statutory Wages Councils and the like, the securing of an agreement remains a matter for bargaining between the parties. No further statutory assistance will be given for the making of such agreements. The Government had gone as far as it wanted. It had left the parties free to reach such agreements as they could, confident of the employers' new-found strength to hold the unions at arm's length, but it ensured that once agreement was reached those employers who had arrived at a settlement should be free from the risk of being undercut by their non-federated colleagues.

Trade Union Strength

Thus we reach the end of the road, where the rosy dreams of the "new society" forecast by such writers as Sir William Beveridge, B. C. Roberts, and others, in the first flush of post-war full employment, have all been dispersed by the cold winds of economic reality. From now on, to rewrite Beveridge in the new context, wages *will* be determined "by the bargaining power of particular groups of men". The trade unions, as the proceedings of the notorious Jack Court of Inquiry into the London Airport dispute made abundantly clear, can only carry out their proper function by fearlessly championing the interests of their members. "Trade unions," as Mr. Ted Roberts, Assistant General Secretary of the Sheet Metal Workers, ringingly declared in presenting the workers' case, "are not an extension of the Corporation's personnel department. A trade union is a defensive and offensive weapon in the hands of labour." The trade unions, said Mr. Roberts, would co-operate with the employers where their joint interests co-incided, but once those interests diverged, then "the unions would continue to

carry out the purpose for which they were formed, namely, to protect and further the interests of their members".

The Report of the Jack Court of Inquiry adversely criticised certain union officials for their militancy, and called for disciplinary measures against shop stewards, the elimination of "subversive elements", and for general submission to the employers' requirements. However, at its meeting held on February 6th 1959, the T.U. side of the National Joint Industrial Council refused to accept the Jack Report and threw it out of the window. This was the first occasion in memory when the Report of a Court of Inquiry set up by the Government had received such short shrift. Up to the time of writing no further Courts of Inquiry have made an appearance on the industrial scene.

The civil aviation industry is, of course, one of those industries in which the main agreement contains provision for unilateral recourse to arbitration through the Industrial Court, in the event of a failure to agree in any matter under negotiation. It is instructive to observe what happens in such a situation. A claim for an increase in pay for hourly-paid engineering workers put forward in May, 1958, was still being stone-walled by the civil aviation employers when the airport strike broke out in October. The stone-walling was, in fact, the cause of the strike. The Jack Inquiry did nothing to resolve this dispute, which went to the Industrial Court in December. When the court issued its award, the employers then disputed the meaning of its terms, but refused to take the new issue back to the court for interpretation. More weary months went by in fruitless discussion, and it was not until one of the unions hinted that it would commence legal proceedings, that the employers consented to implement the award as interpreted by the unions and by the court.

On the other hand, when the British Airline Pilots Association, wearied by over two years of abortive negotiations, attempted to take the employers to the Industrial Court, the employers refused, claiming that, under the statute, recourse to the court could be had only by bilateral consent. The National Joint Industrial Council, in special session, had to draw the employers' attention to the main agreement; even so the matter was withdrawn for further bilateral negotiations. What can happen when the employers know that "there is always arbitration at the end of the road" can be illustrated by the fact that in this industry there are outstanding matters which have been under negotiation for over four years without agreement even on terms of reference.

Small wonder that at its meeting on November

19th, 1959, the T.U. side of the N.J.C. for Civil Aviation gave consideration to a motion moved by the draughtsmen and seconded by the E.T.U., that "due notice be given to the employers' side for the termination of those portions of the Agreements which relate to compulsory arbitration in the event of failure to agree".

At the moment of writing, this subject is still under discussion, but it would seem that similar ideas are now being mooted in the Electricity Supply Industry, where provision for arbitration has long been regarded as one of the "entrenched clauses" of the industry's constitution. It is slowly reaching the consciousness even of the most stolid supporters of constitutionality that the arbitration clause may have some connection with the fact that the manual workers' wage rates in that industry have advanced in real terms only by 2½ per cent in the past ten years, a period in which output per man hour has increased ten times over.

In this situation, the behaviour of the dominant group on the Council of the T.U.C. has been most instructive. With all their precious Mondist heritage at stake, they sought to save something from the wreckage, to make a dutiful obeisance to the real masters of industry, whilst at the same time retaining control and leadership of the trade union movement. Thus at the T.U.C. of 1959 they tried to play both ends against the middle, and to emerge as the true apostles of reasonableness, of all the virtues of the Golden Mean.

The General Council's Inquiry

When congress rejected overwhelmingly a motion calling for the restraining of militant activity by shop stewards (moved by the egregious Mr. Prestwich on behalf of the engineering surveyors—a union which has no shop stewards), the General Council announced that it would itself conduct a thoroughgoing inquiry into industrial stoppages and unconstitutional activities. They also accepted the pleas of certain of the more respectable unions, which were unable or unwilling to use the strike weapon, to strive for the introduction of "a statutory tribunal to which differences may be referred by unions to whom no other arbitration facilities are available".

On the other hand, the General Council felt obliged to support, as did the whole of congress, what the *Guardian* described as "A clarion call on wages" sounded in a motion moved by the Electrical Trades Union. This motion, the shortest ever put before congress, summed up the main

objective of the trade union movement in a single sentence: "This congress declares its support for a policy of wage increases and its complete opposition to any form of wage freeze." The motion clearly called for militant action. As the *Guardian* sourly observed on September 8th: "The very terms that are still the common language of trade unionism—'strike', 'militancy', 'struggle', and the like—presuppose the existence of a state of war between a class of bosses and a class of workers."

It is, perhaps, one of the ironies of history that the mover of the motion, Mr. Robert McLennan, E.T.U. Assistant General Secretary, was able to base the whole of his case upon the Economic Report issued by the General Council itself, in which it declared: "In fact, despite the more militant wages policy approved by Congress since 1956 the Government has succeeded—at a cost—in imposing a policy of wage restraint upon the trade union movement."

The 111 paragraphs of this Supplementary Report on the Economic Situation completely undermined the main props of the Mondist edifice, for they made it clear beyond all doubt that action is still the only prayer which is answered.

The return of the Tories to political power, the boom on the London Stock Exchange, the paeans of joy in the *Daily Express* at "Booming Steel", "Booming Motors" and "Booming Britain" have only underlined the lesson.

All the tripartite twaddle in the world will not now cover up the fact that the issue will be determined "by the bargaining power of particular groups of men". Mr. Robert Willis, the then President of the T.U.C., never put the matter more clearly than he did when outlining the case of his own members (then engaged in the great printing dispute) to the 1959 annual conference of the Mineworkers' Union. Let us repeat his declaration: "We affirm, not out of stubbornness, but because we are expressing the views of many other workers, that we have no confidence or trust in arbitration. We are convinced from experience that in the arbitration court today a claim instead of being considered in its merits, is set against the 'national economy' and the Government's programme. What hope can workers have for justice and a fair deal, when their merits are ignored and only the Government's plans are considered?"

The lesson is plain. The only hope of the workers rests in the strength of their own organisation.

Technological Progress and Price Movements

(The role of technological progress in post-war capitalist crisis, and some thoughts on price movements in the crisis of 1957-58)

R. Bellamy

AMONG the many issues in Maurice Dobb's account of the crisis of 1957-58 (*Marxism Today*, Oct. 1959) two especially call for further discussion, namely those contained in the title of this article. Before embarking on these themes, however, might I refer briefly to two other aspects of that crisis which occupied a large part of the two-day discussion on it at the Economic Sub-Committee's School on Economic Problems this summer.¹

In examining a particular crisis and recovery the purpose is presumably not only to extend our general understanding of the laws of motion of capitalism, but also to discover, as a basis for practical political activity, which particular contradictions of capitalism have been intensified, which—if any—temporarily mollified. Our attention concentrated upon two developments. First, full employment and even a moderate rate of economic growth under capitalism appear to lead to persistent price increases. These accentuate sharply a contradiction always present between two sections of monopoly capital, creditors and debtors. Especially in mature state monopoly capitalism (with a large national debt arising from imperialist wars), a large part of surplus value has to be diverted to holders of state bonds, who are increasingly the big financial institutions (banks, insurance companies, etc.). Since their capital and the income from it are fixed in money terms, a continuous fall in the value of money reduces their share in the real surplus value produced. Hence they develop a powerful resistance to prolonged inflation and to the full employment and economic growth which produced it.

Second, this crisis has shown that the improved terms of trade, and hence enlarged incomes, accruing to the primary producing countries (mainly colonial or ex-colonial) from 1945 to the end of the Korean war were a temporary gain, diminished not only by the cyclical reduction in the demand for their products, but also over the

longer period by the growing self-sufficiency of the industrialised countries. Hence, for the colonial and ex-colonial countries, their own industrialisation becomes at once more urgent and more difficult. For those which have not yet achieved political independence, liberation becomes a more immediately pressing condition of freedom from the intensified exploitation which foreign investors, finding their profits reduced by the fall in raw material prices, will attempt to impose. For those which have won a measure of political independence, any attempt to solve their economic difficulties by accepting further doses of imperialist economic "aid" can only jeopardise the liberation so far attained. Hence both groups move closer to vital crossroads of decision, while for us in the metropolitan countries the more desperate adventurism of our rulers in the colonial field will bring new dangers.

I. THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS IN POST-WAR CAPITALISM.

Maurice Dobb repeats, substantially unchanged from his December 1957 article in *Marxism Today*, the view that one of the two crucial aspects in which the environment of "the so-called cycle" has changed compared with the 1930's is

"the fact that we happen to be in a crucial period of revolutionary technological change, associated with automation, which is capable of giving a boost to investment (and hence to the demand for products of Department I) such as was lacking in the 1930's";

and while he expresses some caution about the persistence of this phenomenon ("at least, there is no reason to suppose that it will persist indefinitely") he concludes that "it may nevertheless be characteristic of a whole period or phase in capital accumulation".

This thesis, if correct, is of great importance. For if the period or phase is of some considerable length (e.g., longer than one cycle) it suggests a vitality in capitalist economy for the coming period such that (as apparently some writers have

¹ See Economic Sub-Committee's *Economic Bulletin*, Summer 1959, pp. 13-14.

already concluded) we may expect growth under capitalism, but slower growth than under socialism. If, on the other hand, it is demonstrable that other forces, some at least of a much more temporary character, have played the major role, then the perspective changes, and the emphasis in propaganda likewise. To say this is not at all to join those who "wait for the slump" as a substitute for leadership in the boom; but it does imply that the expansionary forces are weaker than would follow from Dobb's thesis.

What are the Limits?

Three not unimportant questions need to be aired before coming to the central one: first, how long is this crucial period? Why, from the standpoint of technology and science, should it have an end? Second, may the limits be not in technology or development of science (i.e., in a part of the productive forces) but in the ability of capitalist production relations to employ the new potential? Third, if once it is agreed that production relations affect the rate of growth and direction of the productive forces, should one not look very carefully at a period in which production relations changed so qualitatively compared with the 1930's that Marxist writers have talked of the second stage of the general crisis?

As to the first point, I take it that the "period" or "phase" is of some length greater than, say, a decade. Surely no one would say that it began ten years ago and is now over; hence one might expect that the revolutionary technical change is still with us. Indeed, to look at the socialist world, would it be unreasonable to expect a process (with all its internal contradictions) of uninterrupted revolutionary change? The scientific and technological advance achieved so far has surely only crossed the threshold. Yet already in the capitalist world we find that there is stagnation in investment in plant and equipment, even in the extensive recovery.

As to the second point, I have the impression that Dobb treats the productive forces as if they were an independent, or at least always the initiating, force.

Third, the post-war period has been marked by the weakening of the imperialist countries *vis-à-vis* the colonial countries; it would be surprising if this had no effects upon the pattern of foreign trade of the metropolitan countries, with consequent changes in their pattern of industry. I shall attempt below to show concretely what these changes have been, but merely suggest here that they have been considerable.

Further, if the cold war has been the political reaction of the capitalist world to that change in

the balance of forces, and that political reaction expressed itself economically in rearmament, then what cuts were made in non-war production (in already fully employed economies) depended both upon the relation of forces between the imperialist powers themselves and upon the strength of the people's demands for peaceful construction.

What I am suggesting, in brief, is that if we want to understand the whole pattern of production and investment in the post-war period there is no way other than a detailed concrete analysis of the mutual interaction of production relations and productive forces through time.² This is a formidable task; but at least some of the main features can be sketched in. The sketch here is oriented primarily to putting the technological revolution into what is, in my opinion, its rightful (and subordinate) place.

Investment Not the Key Factor

This last assertion leads right to the heart of the question. Here two points will be argued. First, that investment was not the only, nor, in many countries for a large part of the post-war period, the key factor in full employment and growth. Second, that even when investment is considered both before and after 1954, there is little evidence that technological progress played the key role.

First, the changed production relations of the post-war period have affected the industrialised countries in dissimilar ways. In the U.S.A., with its foreign trade small in relation to national output, the arms drive played the key role. From 1948 to 1954 gross national product (G.N.P.) rose by 23 per cent, total investment by 21 per cent and productive investment more slowly still. Personal consumption by the non-government sector rose by 20 per cent and exports by only 6 per cent. Clearly the main dynamic force was elsewhere—in (so-called) public consumption (i.e., state expenditures) of which arms formed much the largest proportion. This rose by 97 per cent. The main absolute impact of the arms drive naturally fell on the leader of cold war policies, a leadership which in turn reflected the U.S.A.'s new post-war position as the main capitalist force striving for world domination.

In Western Europe, gross national product rose by 40 per cent, gross fixed capital formation (i.e., investment, which in this case includes stockpiling) by 55 per cent, but, after allowing for stockpiling and for non-productive investment,

² An attempt along these lines will be found in the Economic Sub-Committee's Annual Report, "The Trade Cycle in Post-War Britain". *World News*, 25.1.58.

rose no faster than G.N.P. Private expenditure on consumption rose by only 29 per cent and public consumption by only 35 per cent, i.e., both rose *less* rapidly than G.N.P. Hence the demand from the arms programme was not as powerful a force in Western Europe as a whole as in the U.S.A. (It should be noted, however, that since West Germany had no arms programme, the effect of the arms programme on the rest would be more like that in the U.S.A., and the West German growth would be explicable in terms of the growth of both investment in a devastated country, and the growth of exports.)

The main dynamic force in Europe came from exports, which rose by 88 per cent; and since exports formed about one-fifth of the output of most West European countries, this growth had a very big effect upon their total output. Also, since the raw material import content of exports is considerable, and since imports in this period grew less fast than G.N.P., it follows that home-produced materials were being substituted for imports. Both the drive for exports itself, and the substitution, stemmed from the weakened imperialist position of these countries; they were now compelled to export more physical commodities in order to pay for the imports which were no longer being sent in as profits and interest on overseas investments. On the other hand the weakened productive capacity of the defeated imperialist powers left a gap to be filled in world markets.

Types of Investment

Yet even for the United States, to which these last considerations hardly apply, a minor role was played by investment in the period 1948-54:

"... investment in producers durable equipment in 1954 was somewhat below 1948 in absolute amount, and in 1955 it apparently recovered only to about the 1948 level. . . . *The output of most types of producers' durable equipment has in fact declined substantially since 1948, and only increases in metal-working machinery, electrical machinery and passenger cars for business use have kept the total from falling significantly.*"

(United Nations: *World Economic Survey* 1955, p. 28; emphasis added, R.B.)

Second, consider the other influences upon total investment. Here five points can be made:

(a) In many countries, and for a long time after the war, the major part of the total output of investment goods was not taken by plant and equipment (productive investment) at all. In Britain in 1948, for example, plant and machinery installed by the private sector accounted for only

26 per cent of all gross fixed capital formation. If one included plant and equipment in the public sector also, the figure was about 35 per cent (though clearly the investment in the latter field was not so closely geared to profitability as that in the former, nor is it clear that the new power stations, locomotives, rolling stock, gas works, etc., were of a technical quality markedly different from what they replaced, nor, where they replaced nothing, that the expansion was called forth by anything other than need to expand capacity).

New dwellings accounted for 23 per cent, and new dwellings plus other new buildings and works accounted together for 46 per cent of all gross fixed capital formation. (The part played by building was discussed at length in the article in *World News*, January 25th, 1958, as well as in my article "Factors Affecting the Length of the Trade Cycle", *Marxism Today*, March 1958.) Not all authorities would agree with the estimate, implicit in Dobb, that all post-war replacement was over by 1954 (e.g., "the period 1950-57 was exceptional for Europe and Japan, in that they were still recovering from the war"—*National Institute: Economic Review*, September 1959, p. 44.)

Population Increase

(b) No one in this discussion has so far, to my knowledge, even noticed the very considerable population increases compared with the 1930's. That of the U.S.A. has grown by one-third—by more than 40 million people—between 1939 and 1958; that of West Germany by 19 per cent between 1946 and 1958, and even that of the U.K. has grown by 9 per cent since 1937. I am not supposing that the mere appearance of people automatically leads to the investment which would be required to equip them with the same amount of productive and non-productive capital per head as possessed by the existing population. But in conditions of acute labour shortage this is likely to happen; and the mere equipping of the new labour force to the old level requires a formidable amount of capital equipment. The long-term upward trend in state and local government expenditures in the U.S.A., as well as the very big output of houses in West Germany, arise, at least in part, from the need to maintain, under given conditions of class struggle, a given amount of social amenities per head. For Britain the report of the Radcliffe Committee suggests that most of the war backlog was completed by 1953, but adds that "a special effort of investment was still necessary in order to bring the stock of capital into line with the higher level of employ-

ment and production that had been maintained since the war”.

Capital-intensive Investment

(c) The same report, however, appears to support Dobb when it states:

“Technological developments . . . were exercising an increasingly commanding influence on the course of investment. Most of the emerging industries of the post-war world appear to make heavy demands on capital. This is particularly true of the chemicals group, including oil refining and petro-chemicals as well as heavy chemicals, pharmaceuticals, dye-stuffs etc. In the engineering group there has been a less uniform trend: but with the spread of automation, the rise of electronics, and the more elaborate tooling characteristic of the newer branches of industry, capital requirements are rising. In other industries instrumentation is having the same effect” (Report, para. 35).

Yet the very next paragraph goes on to state that one of the bases for technological development has been the high cost of imported materials, and concludes that

“the fact that British imports have barely gained the pre-war level while the national income has risen by about a third (at constant prices) strongly suggests that substitution has been one of the more powerful of these influences; and it appears to have had effects favourable mainly, though not exclusively, to heavy investment” (para. 40).

The interpretation of this, however, requires caution. Even if there had been no technological progress, the mere shift in balance of British industry towards those industries in which production is capital-intensive—i.e., a mere expansion of the rayon, chemical, or oil-refining industries—would, *even with pre-war techniques*, have called for heavy capital expenditure. Further, it is by no means clear that the placing of oil refineries in the Thames, and the building of them with British labour and materials, is a necessary consequence of technological progress; what is clear is that it was designed to economise the foreign exchange of a weakened imperialist country attempting to rebuild its exchange reserves. Nor do I think we, or the miners, would go along with the Radcliffe Committee's estimate that the “shift to oil” is to be explained solely in terms of “the technological trend towards more capital-intensive forms of fuel and power” (para. 36).

However, I have no wish to adopt a single-cause explanation, or one that excludes the effects of technical progress in deepening the organic composition of capital. It is of course true that, even in countries with minimal balance of pay-

ments problems like the U.S.A., the drive for substitute production was conditioned partly by the high prices of raw materials until 1953. But some of the “substitutes” are better than the natural products, and many are not in any sense “substitutes”. No attempt has yet been made to sift out the relative importance of the two effects upon capital: structural change, and technological intensity, in British post-war productive investment.

Productivity of Labour

(d) But at least, if this had been a period of very marked technological improvement in the capital stock, one would expect both a considerable rise in the productivity of labour, and considerable visible proof, either in the form of a general impression by many people, or via figures of expenditure, of the Radcliffe Committee's suggestion that there was a spread of automation and of instrumentation.

Fortunately it is possible to give a rough check to both, which confirms what I frankly admit is only a layman's impression that the more spectacular processes have proceeded neither very far, nor as yet very fast, though they may be accelerating if investment picks up again. (To technologists and other workers whose expert knowledge would help, may the economists appeal for aid?) Is there, for example, in the motor-car industry, any evidence that automation proper (and I don't mean mechanisation) has proceeded further than the machining of cylinder blocks and gear cutting; is, for example, the Ferranti experimental milling machine actually at work in large numbers? *The Times* for August 28th, 1959, gave data for the sales of scientific and industrial instruments and apparatus. In 1958 these were about £64 million, of which about half was control instruments, and electronic computers a mere £5.3 million (since the smallest computer costs £5,000, and large ones up to £250,000, their use cannot be widespread). The sales of the whole industry rose during the economic stagnation of 1956-58 by 9 per cent, and in the first quarter of 1959 were 5 per cent greater than in the corresponding period of 1958. The output of computers (though this includes the output of firms in the office machinery industry) was, however, 40 per cent higher in 1958 than 1957. Whatever may be true of the future, it seems beyond doubt that this particular aspect of the technological revolution has not yet made much impact.

A further indication of technological progress is the rise in the productivity of labour. The following are the figures of the annual percentage rate of growth of output per man-hour in manu-

facturing for the whole period 1950-56, and for the two opening years of the boom 1954-56:

	1950-56	1954-56
United States	2.3	3.1
United Kingdom	1.2	1.9
France	7.0	9.3
West Germany	6.7	5.4
Canada	2.4	1.9
Sweden	2.8	2.0

If the best quarter of manufacturing industry is taken, the increases are greater, though for the countries where one might expect automation to have gone farthest, they are not spectacularly better, viz.:

United States	3.0	5.0
United Kingdom	1.7	3.0

(Source: U.N. *World Economic Survey*, 1957, p. 37.)

If one compares these figures with comparable long-term average rates of growth of productivity in manufacturing, they are not remarkable. In the period 1907-1939, which gave higher rates than the previous thirty years, the figures were: for United States 3.1 per cent, and for the U.K. 2.3 per cent (Colin Clark: *Conditions of Economic Progress* 1951, pp. 226, 269). It is, of course, true that productivity figures are affected by things other than improvements in capital equipment, but these crude checks should give pause for thought.

II. PRICE MOVEMENTS IN RECENT YEARS

The second main point on which I wish to disagree (and in doing so hope to draw others into the discussion) is in the interpretation of price movements and the part which monopoly has played in them during the years of crisis.

On p. 293 Dobb writes:

"A striking feature of the past two years has been the fact that prices in America have continued to rise (with the exception of some food-stuffs) in face of sagging demand. The maintenance of industrial prices in a crisis was already a feature of monopoly capitalism between the wars—nevertheless prices did fall even in monopoly sectors. It looks as if we may now have reached a stage where monopoly is so well organised that it can try to recoup losses by going on raising prices after the boom has broken and the crisis phase is in swing. To this extent, although profit is protected for the time being, the classic mechanism (price cutting and business losses) whereby capacity is eliminated in a crisis is removed."

The view that a monopoly can raise prices in order to maintain, indeed increase, profits, has been even more sharply put by Emile Burns (*Marxism Today*, September 1959, p. 275):

"... the monopolies raise their prices in order to have big profits in order to plough back a large part of them to carry out expansions they have planned."

Monopolies and Prices

First, as to the argument. The statement that monopolies can raise prices (apparently at will, with no reference to the objective market situation) in order to maintain profits is made with apparently no sense that it contradicts flatly the argument we use in order to combat the view that "wage increases lead to price increases". If our contention about those circumstances, when money incomes of wage earners have gone up, and when therefore there is presumably some increase in demand, is valid, how much more is it valid when applied to conditions of falling demand? We cannot have two mutually inconsistent views of the powers of monopolies. We can have only one, and that applicable to both contexts, namely that the power of monopolies to raise prices is determined by the contradictions of capitalism, viz., first, their sensitiveness to the political hostility towards monopoly among wide sections of the people—their fear of some intervention if they behave incautiously; second, the extent of their control over competitors, which may well be considerable in the short run, but (if we believe in the law of uneven development) is much weaker over a longer period (e.g., the Unilever soap "monopoly"); last, the problem of realising the product in a given demand situation. It is the complete neglect of this last argument which is so amazing.

Both Maurice Dobb and Emile Burns write as if a rise in prices guaranteed a rise in profits—and they are both referring to the mass of profit. Of course an increase in price of a commodity (with costs unchanged) raises the amount of profit *per article sold*. But an increase in that raises aggregate profits (the mass of profit) only if the number of articles sold does not fall proportionately faster than the profits margin per article rises. For example, in a situation where demand is given (and that is a more favourable situation for their argument than the one that Dobb is discussing) does an increase in rail fares necessarily lead to an increase in the revenue and profits of British Railways?³

³ Whether profits rise or fall when prices are raised depends upon the demand situation and upon what happens to costs per article as output varies. If the latter remain roughly constant, then it can easily be shown that profits will rise with a price increase only in conditions of an inelastic demand; it can further be shown that any monopoly which was operating in conditions of inelastic demand before the price increase was not maximising its profits.

Dobb is, however, considering a case much less favourable to his argument, namely a falling market, one in which the monopolist would have difficulty in selling his former output at the old price, much less at an increased price. I would like to contest very strongly indeed the view which has been expressed in articles in the Party press (especially by those who lay great stress upon internal accumulation as the source of funds for expansion of capital), a view which has been expressed especially in relation to the oil companies, namely that if they want to finance large development, all they have to do is to raise prices.⁴

The Marxist theory of value is not committed to saying that monopolies raise prices: what it does say is that monopolies can charge a price which is above value (or, more strictly, above price of production). The behaviour of some monopolies since the war has shown that they either cut prices or raise them much less fast than the general price level; what is important here is that when they do so, it is likely that their costs, because of technical progress, fuller utilisation of capacity, growth in the economies of scale arising from an increase in their size, or cheaper raw materials, are also falling, and perhaps falling faster than their prices (see, for example, the unchanged price of gramophone records (minus tax) in 1938 and 1948). But whatever they do, the prices that monopolies *can* charge are no more at the subjective whim of the monopolist than they are at the whim of the competitive enterprise. They are dictated by the three contradictions specified above—their relations with the people as a political body, their relations with their competitors, and the relation between producing power and consuming power. Perhaps they may decide to ignore the first, and control the second: but they cannot escape the third.

Price Increases Slowed Down

My second point is about facts, namely that price increases have slowed down to a standstill and in some cases been reversed, even in manufacturing industry. My third point is to ask whether, given the shallowness and length of the crisis and its different phasing in different countries, one should have expected any spectacular downward movement of prices.

⁴ The implication of this argument would also be the abandonment of the Leninist conception of finance capital; for if monopolies could always, at will, provide the necessary profits to finance expansion simply by raising prices, why should relations between industrial capital and the banking and financial institutions ever be required?

As to the actual movement of prices, there is first a technical point about their measurement which would bear longer treatment. Are we sure that the commodities whose prices are being measured today are the same as those commodities yesterday (especially in a period of new products,⁵ and especially in countries where a considerable proportion of the commodities involved in retail price indices are consumer durables)?

It has been shown (United Nations *World Economic Survey* 1958, pp. 21-4) that the import (raw material) content of consumers' goods, including foodstuffs, has been falling, i.e. that the raw materials are being more worked up; consequently one might expect a slight growth over time of the margin between wholesale and retail prices—though these long-term tendencies would probably not be strong enough to counteract the powerful downward pull on retail prices that we have come to expect from a major slump. It is worth while noting also that the indices of prices used in many investigations both in the thirties and now have usually been based on official quotations from trade associations (in the case of manufactured goods) and do not reflect the concealed price-cutting that goes on. But while these two considerations suggest a certain caution, I am not basing my argument about prices substantially upon them.

The index of consumer goods prices in Britain has shown a slight downward tendency, the more so if the rent increases (administered prices) are omitted; in the third quarter of 1959 (actually after the economy had turned upward) it stood fractionally lower than a year before and below the previous quarter. The U.N. *World Economic Survey* for 1958 reports that

"the cost-of-living index in most countries remained stable during the second half of the year (1958) and in some instances even declined moderately" (p. 197).

In Britain capital goods prices were lower in the first quarter of 1959 than in the corresponding period of 1958, and also below the 1958 average. Export prices of British goods (mainly manufactures) reached a peak of 112 (1954=100) in the third quarter of 1957 (when the U.S. slump began), and have been falling slowly ever since to 108 in July and August 1959 (*National Institute: Economic Review*, Sept. 1959, p. 59). Of the

⁵ How, for example does one compare the new Anglia, or Popular with the old; how does one compare Terylene trousers with worsted, or microcellular soles with leather or rubber, or washed and packed potatoes with those sold loose, etc?

world as a whole, the U.N. Report cited above states:

“Wholesale prices of *manufactured* goods remained generally stable, and in some countries even moderately declined in the course of 1958.”

The Influence of Demand

But, given what happened to demand for goods, especially consumer goods, during the slump, should one have expected drastic falls in prices? The gross national income of the industrial countries taken together fell only fractionally (by less than 1 per cent) in real terms during 1958 because contrary movements in the U.S.A. and Western Europe cancelled out, the U.S. recovery beginning in April of 1958 and being well under way before the decline began in Western Europe in the autumn of 1958. Personal consumption *rose* in 1958 by about 1 per cent in real terms, given no change in the U.S.A. and a 2 per cent rise in Western Europe; in fact in the U.S.A., since

consumption of durable goods went down by 8 per cent that of other consumer goods rose.

We must take into account first, that the downturn was short (about six months in each case) and second (which is the more important), that by any comparison with pre-1945 crises—indeed even by comparison with some pre-1945 booms!—the level of unemployment, though intolerable in any well organised economic system, was low. In a situation where the demand for consumer goods does not fall, why should prices fall substantially? It is the products of the colonial countries which have borne the effects of the sharp reduction in inventories, and suffered price reductions.

In conclusion, I by no means wish to suggest that monopolies have no power to influence prices, nor can it be disputed that the degree of concentration and centralisation of capital have increased with the slump. I am only suggesting that, where the price movements of 1957-9 show only feeble cyclical symptoms, that is because symptoms of cyclical crisis itself, though quite definite, were also, by pre-war standards, relatively feeble.

A Socialist Outlook on Social Services

M. R. Kettle

MOST people in Great Britain don't know socialism at first hand. Some of us, especially in the Communist Party, the left of the Labour Party and in the trade unions talk about it, dream what Britain would be like under socialism and work hard to progress along the road to it. Our discussions, however, and not least the present ones raging round the Labour Party's recent election policy, would be more profitable if in using the word "socialism" we clarified what it means in practice to ordinary people. It is here that the actual experience of socialist countries is important, since what is abstract for us is everyday life for them.

Of all the socialist countries, Czechoslovakia gives us in Britain especially illuminating lessons.

Similarity to Britain

Czechoslovakia, since her foundation, and even when she was to Mr. Neville Chamberlain "a far-away people of whom we know nothing", has always been recognised as advanced. Like Britain, her industry is highly developed, her workers have a tradition of industrial skill and a wonderfully militant history; educationally, socially and politically too she was among the progressive bourgeois countries. The conditions, therefore, in which socialism is being constructed in Czechoslovakia afford a nearer approach than that of any other socialist country to the conditions in which we shall tackle a like task.

Today in Czechoslovakia virtually all industrial and distributive enterprise is on a socialist footing of one form or another, and run either by the government or by some local authority. Eighty per cent of the land is organised either in state farms or in agricultural co-operative farms. With a population of 13½ million, Czechoslovakia comes eleventh in Europe, but is higher in the list as regards coal production, steel and iron, motor cycles, sugar beet and wheat. Her total industrial production is now three times the latest pre-war level for which figures are available, and by 1965 it will be six times as high. This is to be compared with a British volume of industrial production which is now one-and-a-half times its pre-war level.

Czechoslovakia, therefore, still holds a place among the "advanced" nations. Compared with

before the war, however, industrial development is more equitably distributed throughout the country. In the bourgeois republic the Czechs were guilty of neglecting Slovakia, which remained for the most part poor and backward. (A comparison can be drawn here with parts of Scotland and Wales.) Now, in the socialist period, industrial advance, the establishment of new industry and the investment of capital in Slovakia have been given priority in order to raise the standard of living of the Slovak people.

Many a time did I take part in lively discussions as to whether the standard of living of the Czech skilled industrial worker was as high as that of his counterpart in Britain. The very fact that so much argument took place shows how comparable the standards are. People living in villages have cinemas, bus services, television, motor bikes, even if they do not have piped water. This also could be said of villages in England.

But the general atmosphere, the keynote of this, is as different from Britain as it can be. For there are no individual owners to study their own interests above all else. Instead, there is planning of all resources. Whatever local authority, industrial enterprise or co-operative farm we visited, the people told us of their progress towards the fulfilment of the fourth year of the Second Five-Year Plan. They are strikingly confident that the plans will succeed, and that by the end of the Third Five-Year Plan in 1965 spectacular advance will have been achieved. Everywhere, factories are being extended, methods of production improved, automation introduced, new towns built, roads and dams constructed. All this is impressive not only in itself but because it is the foundation for a better life for all the people of Czechoslovakia,

Providing for Social Advance

What does this mean for the ordinary worker, his wife and his family?

The people are busy and work hard. In industry the ordinary working day is from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. The profits from their work come back to the workers partly as individuals in the form of bonuses and partly to them as a community in the form of general benefits. The engineering works in Brno was about to build a new health centre from its

own funds and the clothing factory at Trencin has completed a very fine dining and recreational hall. The agricultural co-operative in Samorin, having 184 families as members and devoting 3 per cent of its total income to its social fund and 1 per cent to its cultural fund, has in the eight years from its small beginning in 1951 to its 100 per cent membership today acquired its own film projector, library and well-equipped gymnasium. They have also built their own administrative buildings and baths, and are now constructing a new sports stadium for the surrounding district. The same thing is true of local authorities, who control about one-third of all state expenditure and manage enterprises covering more than half the population. They use the profit from the enterprises they run to pay for social amenities and welfare services of all kinds.

Widespread Discussion

Certainly the ordinary worker has his or her say in what goes on. We heard of the factory ten-minute meetings held every few days in various departments for dealing with small points, half-hour and longer meetings for bigger questions. There are street meetings for discussion of everyday questions and for electing street committees who act as channels between the citizens and their representatives on higher organs of government. Such committees are also found in blocks of flats. Some of the leading women of Slovakia told how they had organised, through their women's paper *Slovenka*, a "school" for readers who were asked to write letters on such topics as "What I would put right in our co-operative farm". The purpose was to encourage women in the Slovak villages to come forward and contribute their ideas to plans for future development. Over 1,000 entries were received, some of ten or fifteen pages, and some from people who were not at all practised in letter-writing. They had been encouraged to form groups to write their letters, and from the numbers that were reported the organisers estimated that over 10,000 women had taken part in the "school". The letters had been summarised and all the suggestions passed on to the people in charge.

In the spring of this year new regulations were published regarding family allowances and old-age pensions. But before this was done the Communist Party invited discussion by every kind of organisation on the questions involved, and asked for suggestions as to the best types of benefit to concentrate on. (Similarly this summer a congress on cultural activity in a socialist country has been held and was preceded by a great deal of local discussion.) During the discussions on allowances and pensions the Party itself received direct thousands of letters. The new regulations described

below, therefore, were not just thought up by a few experts in Prague but were the result of very thorough and sometimes heated discussion up and down the country.

Allowances and Pensions

With regard to family allowances, the discussion just referred to revealed a consensus of opinion that most of the funds available should be given to help the parents of large families. Important differences compared with our system are that they are paid to the families of people in employment and to some extent vary inversely with their pay. They are not, however, subject to taxation, nor indeed are any social security payments taxable. We were given a fairly average example of a worker earning 1,400 crowns a month. It is always difficult to compare real earnings between one country and another, but if we take the crown as 6d., which is the tourist rate of exchange and is a fairly useful rough-and-ready real measure, this means a worker earning about £35 a month. Such a worker would be paid, if he has one child, an allowance of 70 crowns, or 35s. a month: this is more or less comparable with the amount of 8s. a week paid for the second child in Britain. If the same worker in Czechoslovakia had two children he would receive 170 crowns, or 85s., a month. If he had three children his allowance would work out at over £11 a month; if four children, over £17 a month; and if five children, over £23 a month. The only people I can think of in Britain who receive family allowances on anything like this scale are university teachers in many universities who get £50 a year for every child, and high executives in business, who sometimes have their children's expensive school fees paid by their firms. The giving of help where it is most needed is a socialist, not to say a communist, principle, and receives no more vivid illustrations in Czechoslovakia than in the case of family allowances.

The 1959 regulations governing old-age pensions were designed primarily to help those who had qualified for pensions before the war but who had received no increase since that date, and who were clearly the pensioners in greatest need. The new rate is six times the pre-war level and at present prices (the cost-of-living index in 1958 was 116.7 with a base year of 100 in 1937) is probably about £21 a month.

In Czechoslovakia a retirement pension is the right of all who have been in work. It is not an insurance benefit as it is in Britain; no deduction is made from wages. Old age is there recognised to be a foreseeable period of economic dependence, not a calamity to be covered by insurance. Pensions are paid to retired workers at the age of fifty-five in the case of miners, airmen and women, and at the age of sixty in all other cases. They are based

on the average yearly earnings of the last ten or the last five years (whichever is to the greater advantage of the applicant) before the application for pension. Miners working below ground and airmen receive a pension ranging from 60 per cent of their earnings if they retire after twenty years' employment to 90 per cent after forty years. For workers in particularly difficult jobs the range is from 55 per cent after twenty years and 85 per cent after forty years. For all others the range is 50 per cent to 60 per cent, with the added advantage that, as mentioned before, pensions are not taxed. The actual amount paid on retirement varies therefore between a minimum pension comparable to the present British pension and a maximum of £40 to £55 a month; an average would be perhaps in the neighbourhood of something over £20 a month. Disablement pensions, widows' pensions etc. are similarly regulated, with appropriate variations.

Maternity benefit is payable to women who have been in work for a certain minimum period (270 working days in the past two years) and covers a period of eighteen weeks of which four at least must be before the birth of the child. The amount is again based on the net daily wage earned, calculated on the basis of the last three or the last six months according to which is more favourable to a woman, and ranges from 75 per cent to 90 per cent, with a maximum of 90 crowns (or 45s.) a day. A maternity grant of £16 is paid on the birth of the child. I spoke to the matron of a big children's hospital in Brno who was also an active trade unionist. I asked what her trade union branch had discussed at its last meeting. Among other things she mentioned the problems arising from the welfare rights of the staff, problems of some size, since twenty-three nurses were at that date away on four months' maternity leave. Eleven of these had since returned but, being mothers of young children, they could be allocated to day duty only.

The sick worker can receive early diagnosis and some treatment in the clinic attached to his place of work. Sometimes, if he works in a big concern such as the V. I. Lenin works in Pilzen, there is even a hospital intended almost exclusively for the workers of that concern. Otherwise he will be sent to the clinic or hospital of his own neighbourhood. If he wishes to consult the doctor at the factory clinic—for instance at the polyclinic of the Jan Sverma factory in Brno—he notifies his foreman who informs the office. An appointment is made for him and he is called from the workshop in time to keep it. His consultation takes place in working hours, but if he wants to consult the dentist or the physiotherapist he does so in the afternoon after the day's work is over. The medical staff and the medical supplies are paid for by the

government, and general facilities are provided by the enterprise in question.

For sickness there is an element of insurance, in that a deduction is made from the worker's pay which represents a contribution to a sickness fund. This fund is, however, administered by the local trade union, which has in addition its own funds from membership subscriptions. Sickness benefit amounts for the first three days to 50 per cent to 70 per cent and from the fourth day onwards to 60 per cent to 90 per cent (according to the length of employment) of the net daily wage calculated on the basis of the last three months.

A great deal of voluntary work is carried out by members of the unions in sickness benefit committees, health promotion and in cultural work. Almost all the unions have convalescent homes for their members or facilities available for spa treatment of various sorts. If a worker is sent to such places on doctor's orders he pays nothing, but the unions also have ordinary holiday centres where their members and their members' families can have partly subsidised holidays at a very low cost. We visited one or two such centres and were impressed by their beautiful situations and comfortable design.

Changing Attitude to Work

The ordinary worker, then, works hard, helps to plan his work and sees directly the benefit from what he does. An attitude of respect for work is fostered in the socialist state, and this is so fundamental a factor in the changing of men and women that mention must be made of it here. Apart from the question of who benefits from the work done, the women workers in industry increasingly have the great relief of being able to place their babies and tiny children in nurseries provided by the enterprise where they work (alternatively these are provided by local authorities). Such nurseries as I saw were not merely adequate, they were marvellous. Equipment was spotless and specially designed, surroundings colourful and charming. Those in charge were devoted to the children and skilled in caring for them, and able to call on medical help whenever necessary. The existence of such nurseries must be not only a compensation to mothers but a positive incentive to go out to work. As the little child becomes able to understand such things he will learn to become familiar with the place of work as the source of material and cultural good things—not as so often in our industrial cities a place to be got away from just as soon as possible.

The changing attitude to work is very evident indeed in the new educational system which is at present being evolved. Practical work linked with

local industry and agriculture will be woven into the school curriculum at every stage, including the so-called academic courses which form one of the possible lines of educational progress confronting the child at the age of fourteen (shortly to be fifteen) when he finishes the common school education course. Boys and girls of this age will spend two days a week in a local factory and shorter periods earlier, so that the old academic tendency to despise manual labour will be obliterated. Increased emphasis on practical work is already being laid, and teachers and parents to whom I spoke were enthusiastic. Having taken a two-year general technical course, a four-year apprenticeship course or a three- or four-year "grammar" course, the way to university and higher technical education will lie open to all boys and girls.

Ordinary people are changing in Czechoslovakia, and will change more. The Ninth Congress of the Communist Party, realising the need for more intellectual and skilled administrative workers to come from the working class, called as an immediate measure for the withdrawal of 11,000 selected workers from industry to take special courses fitting them to enter the universities and higher technical colleges. The result of this policy was illustrated for us when we met hospital doctors who had formerly been factory workers, a catering manager who had formerly been a browbeaten shop assistant, factory managers who had formerly worked on the shop floor, and many others, including officials of local authorities. The experience of meeting all these people was a complete refutation of Sir Stafford Cripps's famous dictum that

workers are incapable of running industry. They are fully capable of doing just that, and running the country as well, but only in a socialist country are they given the real opportunity to do so.

People are changing and new socialist men and women will be growing up. A final vivid illustration of this is given by the Brigades of Socialist Labour. These are groups of workers, each group varying in size according to the factory or department where it exists, who compete for the title of brigade. To achieve it they must of course produce what they are allocated to produce under the plan for the enterprise, and do so punctually, efficiently, without waste of material and with good quality work. The title, however, is for the group as a whole, so that everyone in the brigade must be at top level, and the better ones have to help the less good to come up to the necessary standard. There follow other requirements: How do the members of this group behave to their fellow-workers in the factory? Are they helpful and friendly, or not? And how do they behave to their own families at home? These are searching questions, but implied in all these requirements is the socialist concept of a complete person within a community.

In addition to industrial openings, administrative work and cultural and artistic opportunities of all kinds are wide open to the young people of Czechoslovakia, and they have every reason to feel confidence in their future. There are difficulties and there have been tragic mistakes, but the general lines of social advance in Czechoslovakia already show what enormous benefits will be enjoyed by British workers when we too achieve socialism.

Discussion contributions:

On the artist and politics

Ruscoe Clarke*

COMRADE ROBB alleges “an unresolved contradiction in the thinking of Comrade Kettle”. If the artist is only relatively different from other people how can he do his job so well? Robb wants to know why we should be so afraid of drawing the conclusion that there are different *sorts* of imaginative experience, different *kinds* of imaginative relationship with reality! The imaginative world of the mathematician is a “closed book” to him, but mathematics are essential, so why deny the “closed-book” intuitively-grasped observations of the author their own “specialness”!

In developing his themes Robb distorts Kettle on Doris Lessing and her “inner censor”. He concludes by deducing from Marx’s opposition to ignorance that “we must cherish the freedom of the artist to tell us what we don’t already know and what we may resent being told”, and that art must be free “to follow its own laws of development and to gain access to our hearts and minds”.

Once again we are talking about Freedom, but the basic issues at stake will emerge more clearly if some other points in the argument are first clarified. To some “artists” there may be a clear distinction between themselves and the rest of the community, but in fact there can be great difficulty in deciding where to draw the line. Robb talks glibly about the “difference of the artist”. Then he admits that he has in fact been talking about “writers”. Then he tells us in brackets that what he has said applies equally to other artists! But what is an artist? Does he mean to include all who earn their living by writing, everyone on the staff of a daily paper or publishing house with aspirations to write, or

*This contribution was found among Comrade Ruscoe Clarke’s papers, and had evidently been completed shortly before his untimely death. Comrade Ruscoe Clarke had developed major research into the problems of accident surgery as a member of the staff of the Birmingham Accident Hospital; with equal energy he worked in the Communist Party—he was a member of its Midlands District Committee for many years—and in the Peace Movement. His theoretical contributions to *Communist Review* and *Marxism Today* will be known to many readers.

only some dedicated self-selected few? Would he include architects as artists? Does he include politicians and economists and philosophers as writers? Are chorus girls, make-up men, stage managers, cine-technicians and crowd extras “artists” in the world of the theatre, cinema and television? Or is he only talking about selected individuals in these industries, selected because for historical reasons it is possible to imagine that their creative work is of a special kind, since it appears to be divorced from labour and ordinary life?

The two important quotations which he uses to describe Kettle’s “unresolved contradiction” can largely be applied equally to scientists. Science “is one of the essential ways of discovering what men and their world are really like”, and, not least, what their potentialities are. . . . “Of course, in one sense, the [scientist] is different: he is a [scientist]”, and he also can imagine that he has a “special *sort* of sensibility, some special *sort* of direct contact with truth and reality”.

Of course in detail the scientist’s delusions about his specialness are not quite the same, and it is when the scientist gets outside the field of science that he is liable to claim special knowledge in fields that he has not bothered to study. Robb sees that the scientist requires the quality of creative imagination, but even so attempts to put it in a different category of specialness.

Special Pleading

Yet the special pleading for the artist could be worked out similarly for the lawyer and the doctor, the general, the statesman and the designer of space-rockets or bridges, and for many of the members of their teams of associated workers with “lesser” or separate special trainings, skills, and lives of experience. By arguing the specialness of “artists” in general Robb can only be suggesting that the “intellectuals”, the “educated”, must have their “freedom cherished” in some way different from the basic aspiration of freedom for everyone to live gloriously, happily, productively.

If on the other hand the specialness of the other artists was just thrown in to confuse the

issue, we are left with the “specialness” of the “writer” and the historical fact that certain writers and groups of writers have taken on themselves the role of “inspired” prophets of freedom and claimed to be a law unto themselves. This is the subject of Kettle’s essay, and it is misleading of Robb to refrain from discussing Pasternak and the world-wide activities of writers in leading revisionist attacks on the Party—in Britain and the United States, in Hungary, the Soviet Union and China—and everywhere else. In his place he puts up an argument about Hemingway which is interesting but not relevant to the historical period under consideration. The point remains—why writers?

To return to science, it is important to note Robb’s cocky attitude to his own ignorance of the “imaginative world of the mathematician”. An ignorance of mathematics itself can be blamed on the modern dichotomy in our higher educational system. An ignorance of what it is all about must imply a similar ignorance of science, yet surely the twentieth century writer must do something to put this right. The “closed book” must be opened and such philistinism destroyed. Yet Robb is complacent—“Mathematical thinking is not the only important mode of thinking—thank heavens!” Lewis Carroll would turn in his grave!

The argument is nevertheless important, because if the artist is to be considered to be different from the scientist and mathematician in the mode of functioning of his human brain as well as in his “imaginative thinking”, he can claim also to be different in a special way from the social scientists, from the leaders of Marxist thought and action. They too base their decisions and actions on “modes of thought”, and if the artist can correct them because of his special life and background that is so different from the masses and experts in other fields—where cannot we get to? One begins to wonder whether the differences in mode of thought are not of an altogether different kind to those suggested by Robb—differences in ideology based on differences between classes, between revolutionaries and supporters of capitalism, between socialists and anti-communists.

And what is meant by demanding freedom for art “to follow its own laws of development”? Who is to discover these laws? Can they be deduced from within the confines of “the arts” or of any particular “art”? Robb’s claim for the specialness that Kettle disclaims only makes sense in terms of a claim for the superiority of the

“intellectuals” *vis-à-vis* the people—and for inspired “intuitive” thinking as opposed to science and logic.

Robb attempts to take the edge off Kettle’s rejection of the special role of the artist as an individual. He underlines the preoccupation of the aspirant to the cult with “his own” thoughts and feelings, the emotional reality of “his own” relationships with other people. Yet the contradiction lies not in Kettle’s formulation but between the individual and society—with others—with the group—with the collective.

The weapon Robb uses to blunt Kettle’s argument is exposed in the foot-note “certain other kinds of people can be imaginative and intuitive in this kind of way—one thinks of the more imaginative sort of psychologist and philosopher. . . .” The specialness of the artist lies in his “subjective”, introspective, intuitive “free” soul!

A Materialist Approach

But surely it should be possible today to make a contribution to the “laws of development” of art, etc., by attempting to analyse further the phenomena underlying the illusion of “inspired” intuition. And this is linked with the concept of the “inner censor” commonly known as conscience. Both imply the existence of an inner entity which makes feelings more acute and more valuable than conscious logical thought. A modern materialist approach to the phenomena underlying these illusions must be based on a study of the mechanisms of the human brain.

The brain learns and develops by the acquisition and sifting of conditioned reflexes. Experience can lead to reactions suitable to the external situation, even without the mechanisms being understood or verbalised. Experience can do this more effectively when the added human mechanism of the second signalling system of the brain uses words as the basis for generalising experience and sifting its value in social as well as individual practice. This can still leave a situation where the man who has learnt his job well can take effective action without always analysing consciously every factor which led to a particular decision.

But the brilliant acts of apparent genius or artistic brilliance have their roots in individual and pooled social experience. Effective “intuition” is based on conscious activity. Writing is a highly developed technique for pooling the experience of the ages and of the whole world. But there is nothing mystical in it—nothing that

we cannot claim as the right of every man, woman and child: to be allowed to develop, to become skilled in a number of crafts requiring sensitivity as well as mere book knowledge, both derived from books as well as social action.

Conscience is a feeling sometimes felt when contemplated action cuts across established patterns of nervous response to the stimuli of life. The experience of semi-guilt often accompanies a first participation in some action one was trained to regard as socially incorrect—like marching or carrying a poster or speaking at the street corner. With practice it becomes transformed into its opposite or disappears. The same reflex can arise at difficult moments of history when the going is hard. People may feel that an action or a policy is wrong because it goes against their background and training. But this proves nothing at all except the existence of a deeply ingrained contradiction between social tradition and the demands of progressive action.

Intuition describes the fact that we don't always know how our brains are working—but we can try to learn and try to check up on their workings by conscious review of the results and by submitting them to the criticisms of others. Conscience arises from a physical brain conflict. Its use as a substitute for taking the side of progress is a fraud—or its elevation into an “inner censor” or other Freudian absolute.

We reject all subjectivist attitudes to the working of our brains, particularly when they form the basis for streaming, whether at school or in the world at large. Our political thinking can at times be hamstrung by the survivals of idealist illusions. The bourgeois-trained “artist”, or scientist for that matter, has a lot to unlearn. The rejection of these ideological fetters requires the fullest possible participation in the struggle for a new social environment, new relations between individuals based on new relations of production. This alone will remove our illusions of bourgeois freedom based on the fact of our bourgeois privileges—financial or educational.

Chou Yang recently characterised intellectuals opposing the principle that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants and soldiers under such slogans as “write truthfully”. The woolliness of Robb's groping for the “special” can lead in a direction opposite to that of the Party. Freedom under capitalism is the freedom to exploit or to revolt. It is the artist who has abandoned every trace of his subjective feeling of being special who can help us all on the way forward.

T. D. Smith

I WRITE from the standpoint of one who has never done any creative writing. I have done a considerable amount of reading and still do. This faculty I share in common with many Communists, and in my experience critical judgment of literature goes hand in hand with political understanding. Hence our people's judgment is valuable. Very often, however, it is by no means correct.

When I am told by a comrade that *Tilewright's Acre* is a worthy successor to *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, I disagree, and for the same reasons that Dave Wallis gave in his review of the former. I think Dave Wallis's contribution in the October *Marxism Today* is valuable because he discusses the problems of a Communist writer, and in this respect he knows exactly what he is talking about.

If I am doing an experiment and it goes wrong, I can find out the causes and correct the mistake. Moreover I can transmit this information to others in quite precise and clear language (sometimes mathematical). But when I come to discussing the relative merits of two novels such as those I have mentioned, I find that I am at a loss. Both books are about the working class, but only the one is a working class novel. Not only is *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* the best of its kind, it is the only one of its kind.

And this to me is where art is so different from science. An artist produces a complete, harmonious masterpiece, but every discovery of science opens up fresh avenues for exploration. If any committee said to me: “Write a book like Tressall wrote”, I, assuming that I could write at all, would ignore the directive. It just isn't possible.

Millions of people throughout the world listen to Beethoven's music, and from it they rediscover precisely what his contemporaries heard: a new world of meaning. I don't think we understand Beethoven any better than his fellow musicians and listeners and friends. We have only extended the circle of listening. Has any Party committee said, “Write music like Beethoven wrote”? I doubt it very much. When we come to this supreme genius who can write and compose according to direction, I fancy that committees will have ceased to exist, and quite rightly too. The object of all committees should be to eliminate themselves.

Under capitalism the chief problem of an artist is to grasp a new form of society that is expanding with unprecedented speed, that has harnessed science and technique to Communism, and which has found that the world can be changed.

Pasternak ignored, or tried to ignore, all this ferment around him. He was stirred to some petty jabs at the Communists, but he really wanted to be apart and aloof from it all. Now any artists who can

impart the sense of participation in building Communism is doing a first class job, but I can sympathise with the poor devil who tries to comprehend these changes in all their breath-taking magnificence, who tries to mould his art to new social forms, and at the same time is enjoined to observe misleading and frequently contradictory directions (exhortations?) from people who, as Dave Wallis would well put it, have never handled a bloody shovel. The chaps who aimed at the moon, and hit it, had an easy job.

David Craig

STAN SEARCHFIELD and Peter Pink (in *Marxism Today*, October) both pick on Osmond Robb's ideas of the artist's "unique" gifts and try to substitute for it theories which would either deny any such uniqueness or else hint that it was rather a minor, ineffectual sort of talent and achievement that he contributed to society. But Osmond Robb seems to me to have the better grasp of how artists actually work and the healthier esteem for their contribution.

Forexample, Peter Pink, repudiating "uniqueness", says that "in Comrade Robb's view . . . we are divided between artists and non-artists . . . Can we really contemplate a future in which only certain people are able to engage in creative art?" It will be "one of the fruits of socialism and communism" that all will be able to "participate in cultural activities"—as, apparently, "primitive man" once did. Now, Peter Pink has not one concrete instance to make clear what exactly he is after. Consider this famous myth about the old days when the whole village, family, tribe, etc., worked together to compose a genuinely popular or people's art.

Oral Literature

Perhaps Peter Pink is thinking of oral literature such as the Scottish Hebridean tweed-wauking songs, or Ceylonese rice-transplanting songs? But does he really think that *anyone* from the tribe or group of workers can strike out the words for such songs? In the case of the Scottish ballads, no doubt a village would re-word a ballad as it sang it or joined in the refrains; but the majority of these folk-poems must have originated with specially talented travelling singers or reciters (such men are still famous individuals in the Outer Isles of Scotland). That is to say, these artists had something of the special talent Osmond Robb was describing. Certainly they were extraordinarily close to their publics, by present European standards. But how *could* they have got through to their descriptions of

battles, work, legends, traditional dramas of hate, love, prowess, unless they had just that much more consciousness of the common experience of the people—again, the very quality that Osmond Robb was concerned to bring out?

When Osmond Robb says that the artist can "show his fellow-men what they have not been able to see for themselves", he is making a point that *can* be abused or taken too far into a cult of mysterious revelations from behind the veil. But his point is by no means disposed of by Stan Searchfield's example of Tennyson's lurid melodrama about the poor in *Maud*. Lawn Tennyson (as Joyce called him), Queen Victoria's favourite poet and the darling idyll-spinner of the Victorian bourgeoisie, can naturally be very easily demonstrated to have shown nobody anything.

But surely D. H. Lawrence showed many people the way out of a life-denying prudery and repressive blocking-up of our most vital impulses.

Surely Conrad, in *The Secret Agent*, showed (in spite of his being no socialist and often superciliously anti-revolutionary) a great deal of the callousness of the system by which the bourgeoisie use the police and the government to protect their "hygienic idleness" against "the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour", as he scathingly puts it. His insight is inferior to Lenin's in relation to the state as an instrument of class rule, for Conrad will not pursue his insights into social cruelty to their real end in some vision of how bourgeois society might be overthrown. But he is undoubtedly showing people something they may hitherto have been unconscious of or indifferent to. (Here, of course, he is at one with labour leaders, early British socialists, and the like.)

The work of such writers would indeed be a mere carving of little ivory balls if it did not reveal experiences which most people do already have; that is how the writer *shares the life of his public*, i.e. his fellow-men who become his readers. But just as some of those readers will be skilled craftsmen who produce tools and materials without which he could not live, or scientists who make equally vital discoveries, so *he* has unique gifts (though not at all mysterious ones) which give his fellow-men something unobtainable elsewhere. As for his "intuition", it is not a rarefied faculty, but the basic means whereby a novelist, say, can take us into the living conditions and feelings of people who he himself has never been.

"All Will Participate"

Of course we must work for a society where "all will participate in cultural activities". Perhaps factory work, like the old country work, will in time throw up its own songs. Perhaps sections of towns with their own theatres will compose dramas and

operas jointly—actors, composers, and stage technicians all being citizens of the same place, with experiences and aims in common. If Peter Pink suggested anything of the kind, then he would be doing something more than using vaguely socialist ideals as a stick to beat Osmond Robb. As it is, however, Osmond Robb has produced an argument

which does something very rare: he shows how artists have certain special powers, but without the least hint of aggrandisement, of puffing up The Artist so that he himself can share in some of the gas and glory. To imagine that his article will only foment more “anti-intellectualism and contempt for theory” is just looking for trouble.

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